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**THE QUEEN OF GOLCONDA
AND OTHER TALES**

**XVIII CENTURY
FRENCH ROMANCES**

Edited by

VYVYAN HOLLAND

I

THE FAIRY DOLL

[LA POUPEE]

*Translated from the French of JEAN-GALLI DE
BIBIENA by H.B.V., with an Introduction by*

SHANE LESLIE

II

THE OPPORTUNITIES OF A NIGHT

[LA NUIT ET LE MOMENT]

*Translated from the French of M. DE CRÉBILLON
LE FILS by ERIC SUTTON, with an Introduction*

by ALDOUS HUXLEY

THE QUEEN
OF GOLCONDA
AND OTHER TALES

BY
STANISLAS-JEAN DE BOUFFLERS
TRANSLATED BY ERIC SUTTON
WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY HUGH WALPOLE

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

'Aline, Reine de Golconde' was first published in Paris in 1761. 'Ah! si . . .' and 'Le Derviche' were first published in 1810, but belong, as does their author, to the eighteenth century.

INTRODUCTION

The facts about Stanislas-Jean de Boufflers are as follows. He was born at Nancy on May 31st, 1738, and he was the son of Louis François, Marquis de Boufflers; his mother was the mistress of Stanislas Leszczynski, the ex-king of Poland, and it was at his Court at Lunéville that the boy was brought up.

He studied for the priesthood at Saint Sulpice, and it was there that he wrote 'Aline, Reine de Golconde', the first of the stories in this book, at the age of twenty-three. But he did not take the vows, and instead entered the Order of the Knights of Malta.

After serving in various campaigns he reached the grade of Maréchal de Camp (corresponding to our Brigadier-General) in 1784.

In 1785 he was sent to West Africa as Governor of Senegal, and there he remained until 1787. It is worth noting that he was extremely popular with every one, and, indeed, the negroes looked on his departure as a real disaster. Soon after his return he married Madame de Sobran, he was admitted to the Academy in 1788, and afterwards became a member of the States-General.

During the French Revolution he found an asylum with Prince Henry of Prussia at Rheinsberg; at the Restoration he was made joint Librarian at the Bibliothèque Mazarini. He had by this time won a great reputation for

his skill in light verse, and the Paris Salons adored him. He died on January 18th, 1815.

He was a great friend of Voltaire.

He published pretty steadily from 1770 till 1810. 'Aline' appeared in 1761, two volumes of poetry in 1782, the 'Discours sur la Vertu' in 1800, 'L'Heureuse Accident' in 1808, 'Le Derviche' in 1810, and there have been collected editions of his works quite steadily from 1781 until the present day. He has been always acclaimed by the finest French critics, and Octave Uzanne, in especial, has written a splendid appreciation of him.

For ourselves, the three stories in this volume have certain qualities well worthy of our attention. In our own present reaction from what seems to us the sentimentality and undue moralizing of the Victorian period, he has all the elements of a charming surprise. One can, of course, never prophesy with security as to the verdict of later generations on our own contemporary literature, but of one thing we may, I think, be sure, that this present reaction of ours towards realism will be found to be in the English literature of 1915 to 1930 its most dominating note. We are terrified of prettiness; almost all emotion is suspect lest it should be untrue; we believe that the whole duty of the artist in letters is to present life as it is, and not as it may be or as it ought to be.

Then, again, the events of the last ten years have given a terrifying shock to all sense of security, and it seems a stupid impertinence for anyone to hint at an optimistic

philosophy. In very much of this, in the cynicism, the scoffing and the materialism, there is justification for the belief that we are much nearer to the eighteenth-century literature than to that of any later period. When, then, we discover a writer of light verse, of erotic poems, an idol of the Paris Salons, a friend of Voltaire's, we expect to find in his work precisely the spirit that our present state of soul desires.

We prepare for ourselves a picture of this man, gay, cynical, heartless and brilliant. The summary of him by Antoine de Rivarol confirms us: 'Abbé libertin, militaire philosophe, diplomate chansonnier, émigré patriote, républicain courtesan.'

Then there are phases of his life that colour this picture yet more highly. He was obviously, we see, a humanist: the love that the negroes had for him when he was Governor of Senegal proves that he was a man of good heart without prejudice, but nevertheless, also, we can be assured, without sentiment; and then, returning into the whirlpool of the Revolution, we see him as a typical aristocrat of the period, who succeeded, indeed, in avoiding the storm and, by that very avoidance, remained a citizen of the old vanishing world, aristocratic eighteenth century to the end.

He was, too, an intimate friend of Voltaire, and Voltaire is becoming to us more and more a figure of vast and even sympathetic significance. Like every friend of that great man, de Boufflers, as we consider him, is caught into

that fin-de-siècle shadow, and that strange, light, sinister world, the world of the great Frederick and Zélide and our own fantastic Boswell; it is here, we feel, that de Boufflers takes his place.

But then the puzzle comes that the more deeply we examine that world the less truly does it correspond with our own. The 'Ulysses' of James Joyce, the beautiful prose of Virginia Woolf, the stories of Aldous Huxley, the poetry of D. H. Lawrence, all, most certainly, typical works of our period, works, moreover, that would have been quite impossible twenty years ago in England, have they any parallel at all with the dialogues of Crébillon, the charming tales of Zélide or the novels of Voltaire? Here is surely a comparison of great interest to be pursued by some one with far more authority and knowledge than I can claim. This at least one can say, that this new literature of ours, with its iron determination to be betrayed into no foolishness, with its admirable prose and its pessimistic caution, lacks, with all its qualities, one most important virtue, that of gaiety. One may smile at its destructiveness, be tickled by its superior wisdom, be gratified by its honesty, but one rises from its perusal with a suspicion that life as we know it is something to be borne because we must, but to be enjoyed only because of our superior dissatisfaction with it.

So when we come to the stories in this volume, we feel assured from what we know about their author that we shall find in them the eighteenth-century version of our

present discontents. And then, I think, we encounter surprise after surprise. In the first place, the form of these stories is one that is to-day almost entirely neglected. We have never in England been famous as writers of the 'conte': our fiction, at least until the last thirty years, seemed almost of necessity to be something formless, inconsequent and almost endless. None the worse for that, if it is the kind that suits us temperamentally best, but 'form' has until our own day been the last of our literary pre-occupations, and so when, quite suddenly and directed by Russian and French influences, and especially that of Tchekhov, we developed here our own kind of short story, it was very short indeed. Joseph Conrad alone in our own day gave us in 'Youth', 'The Heart of Darkness', and other masterpieces, something that was more than an episode and less than a novel (in our sense of the word), and at present there is no sign of his successor in this kind.

And so the second and third stories in this volume are from the very first difficult for us to classify. 'Ah! If Only . . .' is almost a little novel, almost a comedy in dialogue, almost a philosophy in petto, and almost, one may perhaps say, a poem of manners. It is long enough, one may fancy, to publish by itself in beautiful format with little eighteenth-century engravings; one may see it, perhaps, as a kind of French 'Sentimental Journey', although entirely without Sterne's sentimentality, but its principal effect on us is that it stands instantly as a symbol for all that this period of eighteenth-century French literature

possessed, all that we in our twentieth-century English literature have not.

Gaiety and ironical tenderness, these are the phrases for it. It is the Count rather than the Lady who is the central spirit of the story. The Countess is a figure whom we have met before: her daintiness, her humour, her determination and her irony are delightful enough for us to be enchanted to encounter that charming creature once again, but we have already bowed to her, in her own country, many times, and even in ours. Henry James was, perhaps, her most recent impresario, the Princess Casamassima, Mde. de Meuve, the Princess of 'The Golden Bowl', these are her modern sisters. But the Count is, for one reader at least, unique in his world. He is one of the most elusive figures in fiction and one of the most memorable. How cynically would some of our own modern writers have drawn him! He would for us have been the man in the Shavian manner hunted by the eternal pursuing feminine; he is, you will notice, for ever busied about practical matters. 'The Count, without replying, went to take the measurements of the windows to be replaced; he then despatched a small cart to bring them back, and returned without delay, having hardly left the Countess time to give Martine a sound scolding.' 'Caprices,' he says, 'as well as laws can be our masters,' and you feel that he is a man who will turn any caprice into a law at a moment's notice if it is his fancy. And yet he is also a poet. The Countess surrenders to the beauties of nature because she is resolved to catch the

Count, but the Count surrenders because he is happy, and here is his grand distinction from the Counts of our own time: he enjoys the ecstasy of the moment, and is never afraid to say so; so that although he is in love with the Countess and hopes ardently for a good end to the adventure, this purpose of his does not prevent him from asserting again and again, 'How jolly this is, what a beautiful day, how good it is to be alive!'

This sense of happiness springing from the Count's heart pervades the whole story. We know that the author of it was a happy man when he wrote it, and he was a wise man too, because he does not trumpet his happiness to the irritation of his less fortunate friends, but simply allows it to soak through his story because, indeed, he cannot help himself.

De Boufflers was a master of dialogue. These light, gay sentences seem to dance on the page; they have their own life and force as though they were playing some secret game behind the deliberate intentions of the actors. The danger of dialogue of this kind is that the actors sometimes disappear and become, in spite of themselves, agents without personality, but here the Count and Countess seem to move between the sentences, they are never too brilliant for their characters, and the development of the story is never for an instant lost.

The third story, 'The Dervish', is of another world. It is of that genre very popular in the eighteenth century, in which the East is used as a background for any extension

of your personality that pleases you. The danger here is that your fancy has so free a range that your human nature is easily forgotten. In England, from 'Rasselas' to 'Shagpat', stories in this kind have become, for the most part, decorative rather than emotional, no matter whether that decoration be, as with Johnson, philosophic, or, with Meredith, poetic.

Here was surely a magnificent opportunity for de Boufflers to delight us with all the eighteenth-century cynicism of a French exquisite who believes in nothing but his own wits. But the charm and kindly feeling of this writer led him to develop something much more interesting, and it is the relation between father and son that remains with us when the story is over. The little Preface for the story, a most charming thing, promises us irony. 'It has long been believed,' de Boufflers says, and we can see him smiling as he says it, 'especially in France, that poems, dramas and novels could not dispense with love. Love has become a universal agent, but use has weakened the resilience of the spring; moreover, if the reader will recall all the emotions which the various works of this kind have aroused in him, he will agree that, with few exceptions, the strongest have been produced by emotions other than that of love. Finally,' he adds, 'literature has its duties, and to give pleasure is not one.' We know, then, that to give pleasure is exactly what de Boufflers intends to do; but here again, as in the other two stories, his creations, although they never carry him away, are so real to him that

he forgets about duties and purposes. The Dervish is so charming that he does what all fine characters in fiction do, extends beyond his environment, is a man of no country nor time, but is a friend of us all, is of the family of Quixote and Goldsmith's Vicar, and France's Bergeret and that wonderful old gentleman in 'The Arabian Nights', whose benevolences to the young were so many that they were as the sands of the sea.

This story is surely a little masterpiece. The meeting between father and son is one of those unforgettable things about which it is a crime to say anything.

I say also nothing about 'Aline', because it is a French classic. It is this little parable, so perfectly proportioned, so exquisitely wrought, that has given, in the main, de Boufflers his place in French literature. The whole of his art is in it, and it would be pleasant if one might fancy that the publication of it here might assist in bringing back into our own modern literature something of the grace and gaiety that are at present our most obvious need.

HUGH WALPOLE

January 1926

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THE QUEEN OF GOLCONDA

THE QUEEN OF GOLCONDA

I HAND myself over to you, O pen of mine! hitherto my brain has directed you, now you may direct me and give orders to your master.

The Sultan in the *Thousand and One Nights* asked questions of Dinarzade; the Giant Molinos talked to his Monster; and they told them stories. Now you may tell me a story that I do not know. I am quite indifferent whether you begin in the middle or at the end.

As for you, my readers, I warn you, in advance, that it is for my pleasure and not for yours that I am writing. You are surrounded by friends, mistresses and lovers: you have no need of me to amuse you; but I am alone, and I should like to make use of my own company to the best advantage.

Harlequin in similar circumstances calls Marcus Aurelius, Roman Emperor, to his assistance to send him to sleep. I shall summon the Queen of Golconda to wake me up.

I was of an age in which the body, hardly as yet developed, becomes conscious of an entirely new world, in which we find ourselves in fresh relations

with the beings that surround us; when our more awakened senses or a more ardent imagination makes us discover the truest pleasures in the sweetest illusions.

In a word, I was fifteen years old, and I was far away from my tutor, mounted on a tall English horse, following some twenty hounds which were hunting an old boar: you may imagine whether I was happy. After a run of four hours, the hounds gave up and so did I. I lost the hunt. My horse was out of breath after the long gallop, and I dismounted. We both of us rolled on the grass, and he then fell to grazing, while I went to sleep.

I breakfasted on bread and a cold partridge, in a smiling valley in the midst of rising ground, crowned with green trees; at one point I caught sight of a hamlet built on the slope of a distant hill, and in between lay a broad plain covered with rich crops and delightful orchards.

The air was pure, the sky serene, and the earth was still gleaming with the pearls of the dew. The heat of the sun, who had hardly completed the third of his course, was as yet mild, and tempered by the breath of a gentle west wind.

Where are those amateurs of nature who are so adept at the enjoyment of fine weather and a beautiful landscape? It is for their benefit that I write: I myself was at the moment rather less

occupied with the beauties of nature than with a lovely peasant girl in a white petticoat and stomacher whom I saw approaching from a distance with a jar of milk on her head. With secret delight I observed her cross a plank which served as a bridge over the stream and follow a path which would lead her near the place where I was sitting. As she came nearer, she looked charming: and without in the least understanding my own feelings, I got up to go and meet her. Every step that I took increased her beauty in my eyes, and very soon I began to regret that I had not hurried to her encounter. The ladies of Georgia and Circassia are monsters compared with my little milkmaid, and never had so perfect a creature adorned this universe. I did not know what compliment to pay her to open the conversation, so I asked her to let me drink a little of her milk to refresh myself. I then addressed her a few questions about her village, her friends and her age. She replied with a naïveté and grace which made her words not unworthy of her lovely lips.

I learnt that she belonged to the neighbouring hamlet and that her name was Aline.

‘My dear Aline,’ said I, ‘I wish I were your brother’ (though that was not at all what I meant).

‘And I wish I could be your sister,’ answered she.

‘But I love you just as much as if you were,’ I added, and kissed her.

Aline tried to defend herself from my caresses: and in her efforts she dropped her jar of milk, which flowed all over the path. She began to cry, disengaged herself furiously from my arms and tried to run away. Her foot slipped in the spilt milk and she fell backwards: I rushed to her assistance, but in vain. A power stronger than myself prevented me from raising her, and dragged me with her to the ground. I was fifteen years of age and Aline was fourteen. It was then and there that Love waited for us and gave us his first lessons. My happiness was first troubled by Aline’s tears, but her delight soon overcame her agitation and changed them into tears of pleasure. It was then that I really understood what pleasure can be, and the even greater joy of giving pleasure to some one that one loves.

Time, which seemed to have ceased to have any existence for us, continued his course for the rest of nature, and the sun, which began to approach the horizon, recalled the shepherds to their huts and the flocks and herds to their byres: the air was full of the sound of pipes and songs of the workers returning to their rest.

‘It is time for me to go,’ said Aline, ‘and my mother will beat me.’

I still respected my mother in those days, and it did not occur to me to deprive her of the respect that she had for hers.

‘I have lost my milk and my honour,’ said she, ‘but I forgive you.’

‘Come,’ said I. ‘You are whiter than your milk was, and pleasure is worth more than honour.’

I gave her the little money that I had about me, and a gold ring that I was wearing on my finger: she promised never to lose it. My face was still close to hers, and when we parted our cheeks were damp with tears and kisses. I mounted my horse again, and after following my dear Aline with my eyes as long as I could, I took a final farewell of the place which had been hallowed by my earliest delights, and went back to my father’s house, with infinite regret that I was not a humble peasant in Aline’s hamlet.

I had quite made up my mind never to hunt except in that delightful valley, and to spare all the game in the neighbourhood in honour of Aline. But these cherished plans vanished like a dream. I was told on my arrival that unexpected news made it necessary for my father to leave for Paris on the following day. He took me with him. I cried as I kissed my mother, but it was for Aline that I was crying.

Time eats away steel and wears out love. On my

departure I was inconsolable, but I consoled myself on my arrival. The farther I got from Aline the farther she seemed from my heart: and in the pleasure of entering upon a new world I forgot the delights of the one that I was leaving. Light loves and ambition took Aline's place in my heart. I served in six hard campaigns, from which I got wounds enough, but very little advantage. I returned to Paris to recoup myself in the service of Beauty for all that I had suffered in the service of the State.

One day as I was coming out of the Opera I happened to find myself by chance standing beside a pretty woman who was waiting for her carriage. She looked at me attentively and asked whether I recognized her. I replied that it was the first time that I had had the pleasure of seeing her.

'Look at me carefully,' she said.

'That is easily done,' I replied, 'and indeed the sight of your face would compel me to obey you; but the more I look at you, the more I know that I have never looked on beauty till this moment.'

'Since my features do not recall me to your memory,' said she, 'perhaps my hands will be more fortunate.' She took off her glove and showed me the ring that I had long ago given to little Aline. I was too amazed to speak. Her carriage appeared, and at her request I followed her into it.

This was her story.

‘Perhaps you remember my jar of milk and all that I lost at the same time as I lost the milk. Neither you nor I knew what we were doing, but I soon discovered the result; so did my mother, and turned me out of the house. I went and begged my bread in the neighbouring town, where an old woman took me in. She called herself my aunt and me her niece. She took pains to dress me up and introduce me into company. I often repeated under her orders the lessons that you had given me, and as your immediate successor was the Curé of the place, a share of your offspring fell to him, and he has since turned him into a very personable choir-boy.

‘My aunt, hoping that my beauty would be of even more service to her in a great city, took me to Paris, where, having passed through several different hands, I fell into those of an elderly magistrate. He was one of the most important personages in the kingdom, but he made an insignificant figure as a lover, and when without his wig, his robes and his portfolio, he was reduced to a remarkably small compass. Still, what was left of him loved me to distraction, and lavished money and jewels on my aunt and myself. My aunt died, and I became heiress to about twenty thousand francs a year and a considerable sum of ready money. The profession that I had followed

hitherto had become tedious to me, and I wanted to take up the profession of respectability, which, of course, can be tedious too. At the cost of two louis to a genealogist I secured a descent from a tolerably good family. Certain connections that I formed with some men of letters secured me a reputation for wit, and perhaps even a genuine trifle of that gift.

‘At last, a man of good position, with an income of more than a hundred thousand francs a year, married me as some slight acknowledgement of my virtue, and poor Aline is at present known to the public as the Marquise de Castelmont; but for you the Marquise de Castelmont wishes still to remain Aline!’

‘And whom did you love the most of all?’ I asked.

‘Can you ask?’ she answered. ‘I was innocent when you saw me, but afterwards I was innocent no more. I had begun to adorn myself, and I was no longer as pretty as I had been. I had to make myself agreeable: I could no longer love. Art spoils everything: the rouge which we put on discolours our cheeks; the feelings that we affect make our hearts cold. I loved you, and you only, and although it would be easy to be more faithful than I am, it would be impossible to be more constant. Your image, which was always present to my mind

in my infidelities, nearly always destroyed my pleasures, though from time to time I will admit it did lend them piquancy.'

I was really delighted to have met my dear Aline again. We fell into each other's arms with all the rapture of those happy days when our lips had touched no others and our hearts leapt at the first solicitations of desire.

We reached her house: I stayed to dine, and as Monsieur de Castelmont was away, I took the privilege of remaining when all the other guests had gone. Love is no friend to gilded alcoves and gorgeous couches: he likes to hover above enamelled meadows and in the shade of verdant forests. My happiness, therefore, was but that of passing the night in the arms of a lovely woman; but she was not called, and, indeed, she was no longer; Aline.

All you lovers who wish to make acquaintance with love or merely with pleasure, do not set about your adventure with your pocket full of letters from the Chancellor which will compel you to go off to the wars. It was in such circumstances, I am sorry to say, that I met with Madame de Castelmont. How long will glory, that false jade, make us hate sweet repose and gentle pleasures? How long will men prefer war to love? I was, indeed, too young yet to make these sage

reflections: an ensign, as I then was, thinks more of becoming a field-marshal than a philosopher, and notwithstanding all our harsh treatment by the King's Ministers, it is usually easier. So when I left Madame de Castelmont I got into my chair and betook myself to fresh distractions.

After spending fifteen more years away from my country, and receiving many wounds in Germany and much injustice from the Court, I went out to the Colonies with the rank of lieutenant-general.

A storm at sea appears to be an experience reserved to poets and Gascons, and I leave it to them to describe it. I reached my destination without incident. All was peaceful on my arrival, and my sojourn in India was more like a pleasure trip than a military appointment. There was nothing for me to do, so I visited the various kingdoms that compose that vast country, and I stopped in Golconda. It was at that time the most flourishing State in Asia. The inhabitants were contented with the rule of a woman who governed the King by her beauty and his kingdom by her wisdom. The public exchequer and the pockets of the citizens were equally well filled. The peasant cultivated his land for his own benefit, which is far from common, whilst tax collectors derived nothing from the State, which is even more uncommon. The towns were adorned with splendid

buildings, and were even more distinguished for the variety of delights which they offered, and they were filled with contented citizens who were proud to inhabit them. The fertility of the soil, the freedom of the life, and the regard which the government paid to agriculture, kept the country people on their land. The favour of the Queen was the spell which bound the nobles to the Court, for she was acquainted with the art of rewarding their fidelity without exhausting the Exchequer—that infallible and charming accomplishment of which queens make far too little use for my taste; it may be added that the King her husband was unaware of these activities. I arrived at the Court and was agreeably welcomed. I was first received in public audience by the King, and subsequently by his Queen, who, as soon as she observed me, lowered her veil. Her reputation had led me to think that she made very little use of this garment, and I was considerably surprised by my reception. However, she greeted me very pleasantly, and all that I could complain of was that I had not seen her face, which I was dying to do, partly because it was said to be very beautiful, and partly because everything connected with a great queen is extremely interesting.

When I returned to my lodging I found an officer who offered to show me, on the following

day, the garden and the park surrounding the Palace. I agreed to his proposal: we got up at dawn, and I was conducted through magnificent avenues into a thickly planted spinney in which myrtles, acacias and orange-trees commingled their fragrance and their foliage. We found a horse tied to one of the trees: my guide vaulted lightly upon its back and, blowing a blast upon a horn which he was carrying, he went off at full gallop. I continued along the path on which I was walking, much astonished at the conduct of this officer, for I found it difficult to conceive of a country in which it was the practice to see that strangers lost themselves instead of taking them out for a walk. But judge of my surprise, when, upon reaching the edge of the wood, I found myself in a place exactly similar to that in which I had first known love and Aline. The meadow, the hills, the plain, the village, the brook with the plank across it, the path—all were the same: all that was wanting was a milk-maid, and one very soon appeared wearing clothes like Aline's and carrying an identical pail of milk.

'Is this a dream,' I cried, 'an enchantment? Is this an empty shadow that deceives my sight?'

'Not at all,' said she. 'You are neither bewitched nor asleep, and you will find in due course that I am not a phantom. It was Aline herself who recognized you yesterday and who wished you to

see her again in none other guise than that in which you had loved her. In your presence she has unburdened herself of her crown and resumed her milk-pail; it was you who made her happier as a milkmaid than she ever is as Queen!’

I forgot the Queen of Golconda and saw only Aline: we were alone, and queens are still women. I recovered my first youth and I treated Aline as if she too had preserved hers, since it is always assumed that queens never lose it.

After this delightful scene of recognition, Aline resumed her royal apparel, which a confidential slave, who was with her, brought to her. We entered the Palace and I saw her receive her entire Court with an elegance and good nature that charmed all who were present. Some she greeted, others she talked with, and she smiled at every one: in a word, she had all the air of the mistress of her subjects, rather than their Queen.

After dinner, at which all the Court sat down in her company, I followed her into a separate apartment, where she made me sit beside her and related her adventures.

‘The Marquis de Castelmont was killed in a duel about three months after your departure, and he left his widow desolate, with an income of forty thousand francs as her only consolation. Part of his estates were in Sicily, and I was told my

presence was necessary there. I set out on my journey with much enjoyment; but an adverse wind forced us to put into a remote coast, where an even more adverse Turkish pirate took us and carried us off. The captain treated our crew with all the barbarity, and me with all the consideration of which the Turks are capable; he took me to Algiers, thence to Alexandria, where he was impaled. I was sold as a slave with all his household goods, and fell to an Indian merchant, who brought me here and had me taught the language, in which I soon made considerable progress. I had known poverty, but never unhappiness, and I could not endure the condition of slavery. I fled from my master without knowing where I was going, and fell in with some eunuchs who, thinking me beautiful, brought me to the King. It was in vain that I begged him to spare my virtue. I was put into the Seraglio: and from the following day I received from all who surrounded me the honours due to the favourite Sultana, which the King had accorded me during the night. In a brief space the King's passion for me knew no limits, and my authority became consequently boundless. The citizens of Golconda, who had become accustomed to obey the orders that I dictated from the depths of the Seraglio, were in no way astonished to see me become the wife of

the sovereign, who had long been, merely the first of my subjects. In my Palace I recalled the little village in which I had preserved my innocence, and especially the charming valley in which I lost it. I wished to imprint once more upon my eyes the delightful image of my earliest years and my earliest pleasures. It was I who built the hamlet that you saw enclosed within my park. It is called by the name of my own home, and I regard all its inhabitants as my relations and my friends. Every year I arrange marriages for some of the girls, and I often ask some of the older inhabitants to my table to recall to my mind my old father and my poor mother, to whom I should have been glad to show respect had they still been with me. The grass in the meadows is never disturbed except by the dances of the youths and maidens of the hamlet. As long as I am here the woodcutters will spare the trees that are the counterpart of those that lent their shade to our embraces: and my peasant clothes, which I keep among my royal ornaments, serve always to remind me, in the midst of the splendour that surrounds me, of my original obscurity. They forbid me to despise a condition which was less deserving of contempt than any which I have since achieved; they teach me to respect humanity everywhere, they instruct me how to rule!

The Queen of Golconda was indeed a charming potentate: she was at once a good queen, a good king, a good woman and a good philosopher. She was more than these: she was an admirable lover. Alas! I only knew this for fifteen days. I was deprived of her company by her husband himself, and was constrained to leave the country through the window of her bed-chamber. Shortly afterwards I returned to France, where I reached the highest dignities, and fell into the deepest disgrace, though I deserved neither the one nor the other. Since then I have wandered from country to country impoverished and in despair; at last I have met you in this wilderness, and here I mean to stay, since here I find solitude and friendship.

My reader has perhaps been under the impression hitherto that it is to him that I am telling this story, but as he did not insist on this point, he will raise no objection to the narrative being addressed to a little old lady clad in palm-leaves, who has long lived in the desert to which I retired, and asked me to tell her my more interesting adventures. Perhaps they seem tedious to those who read them; but the little old lady listened to them with the most particular attention. She did not miss a word, and when I had finished, she said:

‘What pleases me most in your story is that there is not a word in it that is not true.’

‘How do you know?’ said I. ‘I may have been lying to you from beginning to end!’

‘I am certain you have not,’ said she.

‘Perhaps madame is not unfamiliar with the art of magic?’ I continued.

‘Not particularly,’ she replied; ‘but I have a ring which enables me to judge of the truth of what you have said.’

‘The only ring known to me which possesses that property is Solomon’s ring.’

‘Don’t you recognize Aline’s ring?’ said she, smiling and showing me her hand; ‘Aline, whom you raised to the throne of Golconda, had, on your account, to abandon it; it is I, a fugitive and an outlaw, who came to seek in these remote places a refuge from my husband’s anger, which you managed to escape by leaping out of the window!’

‘What! can it be you once more?’ I cried. ‘I must indeed be very old, because so far as I can remember I am a year older than you. But it must surely be impossible to be a year older than you look?’

‘What matter our age and our looks?’ said she gravely. ‘Once we were young and handsome, now let us be wise, and we shall then be more contented. In the age of love we fling it away without enjoying it: now that we have reached the age of friendship, let us enjoy it instead of wasting

our regrets. Delight has but a momentary existence, but a settled enjoyment can last a lifetime. The former may be likened to a drop of water, the latter to a diamond. Both shine with equal brilliance, but the merest breath can extinguish the one, while not even steel can deface the other. The drop of water borrows its brilliance from the light, the diamond bears its light within itself and sheds it upon the darkness; thus anything may destroy pleasure, but nothing can injure happiness.'

She then conducted me to a lofty mountain covered with fruit-trees of various kinds: a stream of clear sparkling water flowed down from the summit in a thousand twists and turns and came at last to rest in a small lake at the entrance to a cave in the foot of the mountain.

'There,' said she, 'consider whether this is not enough to satisfy you: here is my dwelling-place, and it may be yours if you wish it. The soil only needs the slightest cultivation to repay you abundantly for your trouble. This translucent water invites you to taste of it; from the top of the mountain you can observe several countries at the same time. Climb up it, and you will find a lovelier and a healthier air; you will be farther from the earth and nearer to heaven; then consider what you have lost and you will tell me afterwards whether you wish to try to recover it.'

I fell at the feet of the divine Aline, filled with admiration for her and disgust at myself: our affection was greater than ever, and our life together became all the world to us. I have already spent several delightful years with this wise companion: I have left all my foolish passions and prejudices in the world which we have forsaken. My arms have become more acquainted with labour, my mind has deepened and my heart has grown more sensitive. Aline has taught me the charm of simple toil, of gentle thoughts and tender feelings: and so it is only at the end of my days that I have begun to live.

AH! IF ONLY . . .

AH! IF ONLY...

A German Story

‘STOP! stop, curse you! stop, you scoundrel, or I’ll blow your brains out!’

Such were the words that fell from a young traveller who was approaching from one side, uttered in a voice of thunder and with all the most forcible accompaniments that the German language could provide; on the other could be heard two female voices screaming their loudest, ‘Pull up, pull up, postilion, for the love of heaven! we shall be smashed to pieces!’ The accents of anger and of fear were to be clearly distinguished. Yet the voices came nearer, the shouts of ‘Halt, halt!’ grew more vigorous, the screams of ‘Pull up!’ no less shrill. All this disturbance came from two carriages that were travelling towards each other at full gallop through the darkness on the wretched cobble stones of Flüßenstadt. The night was dark, there were no lights in the town, the street was narrow, and the postilions drunk . . . and suddenly their headlong career came to a stop with an appalling crash. The carriages collided, the wheels were locked together, the traces snapped, the axles broke, the springs were split to fragments, and the bodies of the carriages were only kept from

collapsing by their mutual support. At this juncture a man's head and a lady's emerging simultaneously from opposite windows came into contact, but something less abruptly than the carriages had done, and both parties escaped with nothing more serious than an unexpected kiss.

'Good heavens, madam!' said the gentleman. 'I hope I have not hurt you.'

'Not at all; and you?'

'Quite the contrary, madam: chance could hardly have introduced me to you in a more agreeable manner.'

At the noise of the collision, the cries of the travellers, the clatter of the horses' hooves and the oaths of the postilions, the worthy citizens of Flüßenstadt, who were surprised to hear any noise but that of snores during the night, woke up with a confused idea that the end of the world might have arrived. Everywhere there was a stirring of fires, a lighting of lamps and candles, tapers and pipes, etc.; and soon a collection of gentlemen dressed in jackets, in shirts and in dressing-gowns, was busily gathering round the two carriages, clambering into the seats, over the shafts and up the steps, at the risk of causing a final collapse, discussing the accident with each other, commiserating with the unfortunate travellers, blaming the postilions, the horses, the roads, the darkness, but, above all,

incapable of conceiving that anyone should at that hour be otherwise accommodated than between two large feather beds, in accordance with the long-standing custom of that excellent and imperturbable race. However, Herr von Glücksleben, who had managed to extricate himself by the front window, politely moved the inquisitive crowd aside, observing that he was really concerned for their safety, since, though they were not of a heavy habit of body, the slightest weight might bring the carriages down and they would run the risk of a fall. Then he climbed as well as he could over the tumbled heap of prostrate horses and tried to reach the unknown lady whom he had so lately kissed. But a smell of burning, which was soon followed by something of a conflagration, diverted his purpose: it was the old damask dressing-gown of the Burgomaster that in the confusion had been set on fire by a child's lantern. Although Herr von Glücksleben was extremely anxious to offer his services to the lady, he thought that the extinction of the Burgomaster was an even more pressing concern. While the good man's worthy fellow citizens were deliberating as to how this might best be done, and were actively getting ready to fetch some buckets of water from the town well some hundred paces distant, the flames were gaining ground and had

already reached his shirt. Herr von Glücksleben, who was rather freer in his movements than all these excellent fellows, incontinently seized upon the dressing-gown and shirt and put out the fire. The worthy fat Burgomaster, absorbed in the contemplation of Frau von Blumm, had at first noticed nothing, and he was modestly astonished that the Count should be talking to him rather than to the lovely creature in the carriage; but a sudden breath of rather more than bodily heat soon warned him that something extraordinary, something, indeed, that demanded his exclusive attention, was happening in his neighbourhood. So, without wasting time in remarks which could not be prolonged without risk, or in acknowledgements that could not be offered with decency, he hastily betook himself and his somewhat curtailed attire to his house, and returned shortly afterwards in a more presentable condition.

As soon as the Burgomaster's conflagration had been overcome, the Count, who had already come into such fortunate contact with Frau von Blumm's countenance at one of the windows of the carriage, appeared unexpectedly at the other, and with the same happy result. No one will believe me, but fortune did so ordain it.

'A thousand pardons, sir,' said the lady.

'It is for me to ask your pardon, madam, and

above all to express my gratitude for the fortunate chance that has again so favoured me. But first of all, madam, will you give me your orders? My servant has unfortunately gone on ahead and is to wait for me a few posts farther on, so that you have no one but myself to serve you.'

'But don't you suppose, sir,' said little Martine, 'that I shall help my godmother as soon as I can, and with all the more affection, knowing her kindness as I do?'

'I must ask you to forgive her, sir,' said the lady; 'you see how young she is. But have you not hurt yourself with that absurd dressing-gown? I was amused at first, but then I became very frightened, and though I was in difficulties, and you left me to go to the poor man's help, I could not but commend so kindly an impulse.'

'Nor could I,' said Martine. 'It is a fine thing when a handsome gentleman is kind to you as well.'

'But while I admired you,' the Countess went on, 'I was afraid you might carry the marks of it away with you.'

'You were, and you are, too kind, madam. I escaped with nothing worse than slight burns.'

'Indeed, I am sorry.'

'I would not grudge a finger to save a man's life.'

'Tis a high price to pay for one unknown to

you; what would you do for a person whom you loved?"

"That depends, madam. In that case I should perhaps say, "I would not grudge my life to save a finger." "

"Truly, I am astonished at myself. You must have lent me your courage, for here we are making elegant conversation as if we were in a Paris drawing-room. Yet it is quite clear that our present position can hardly continue. Do you think we shall ever get out of it?"

"Yes, madam, and, I hope, without discredit to either of us."

"I thank you, sir. I could not have recovered my confidence without your assurance. But," she added in French, not wishing to be overheard by the bystanders, 'will our carriages be safe if I can manage to get out of mine—for we have no one here to look after them?"

"On the contrary," said the Count, 'you have everybody. You cannot be aware that you are among the excellent Swabians, who are loyalty itself, whose honesty is surpassed by no other race in the world, if, indeed, it is anywhere equalled.'

This reply was not without effect. One of the company, who understood French, translated to another the last remarks of the lady and the cavalier. They were quickly passed on, and all the

worthy fellows were soon crowding round the Count in the most friendly manner, flattered by his respect for them and making him a thousand offers of service. Ropes, hammers, levers and grapples had already been produced for the purpose of getting to work on the two carriages, when a large door was seen to open like the portals of the Palace of the Sun, from which there poured a sudden flood of light: in the centre could be observed the Burgomaster, this time attired from top to toe, wearing all the insignia of his office, and walking, like the Rector of a University followed by his four Faculties, between four Municipal Guards, each of them armed with an enormous torch, which seemed intended as much to dazzle the eyes as to shed light upon the scene. Apart from this little display of vanity, which may be regarded in Germany as a disease common to Burgomasters, it soon became clear that he was the politest gentleman in the world. His first care was to express his thanks to the Count with the gratitude of a soul lately saved from Purgatory. The Count, who took no particular credit for his performance, tried as far as he could to break the thread of this discourse, while the other as persistently renewed it.

‘First of all, my dear Burgomaster,’ said the Count, ‘let us, as best we may, assist this lady and

her young companion to get out of the unpleasant position in which they have been for three long quarters of an hour.'

'Yes, please get us out of this,' came voices from the carriage.

But this was none too easy, and the Count himself thought that for the time being the two travellers would be best advised to maintain the *status quo*, because the bodies of the two vehicles, as has been indicated, being supported against each other, any attempt to disturb them might bring them crashing in fragments to the ground; so that in extricating Frau von Blumm it was necessary to take as many precautions as in a game of Spellicans. Thus, before allowing anyone to approach, the Count began by carefully removing all the pieces of glass from the front window, which had been smashed, and then he took charge of the Countess. The Burgomaster did the same for Martine, and finally, to their great relief, they were both of them delivered from their prison.

Once out of their difficulties, the lady and the cavalier asked for the best inn. The Burgomaster answered, with an appearance of malice, that no one ever came near the town, that travellers went through it like cats on hot bricks, that in the taverns of Flüßenstadt only tables and no beds could be

found; and all the time he was laughing uproariously at the strangers' predicament. When he had allowed his merriment to subside, he took them to his own house, where, while repairing the damage caused by the fire, he had ordered supper and two rooms to be made ready, and the best beds that he had in the house, and while on their way there the good man expressed his delight that their accident had secured for him the honour and pleasure of entertaining so noble a company. While the exchange of compliments was proceeding, they reached the door, where a charming young lady was waiting for them. She was the daughter of the house. She had ordered and arranged everything in the interval with a care and tact the like of which is nowhere found but in that country where hospitality is not merely a virtue and a duty, but a science as well.

They sat down to table: our two strangers, touched by the Burgomaster's kindness, ate more out of politeness than from appetite. The subject of the conversation may be easily imagined: every piece of news from the Court—that is to say, the Court of the Burgomaster's country—is always more disastrous than the last.

'Let us first get hold of some workmen,' said the Countess, 'and find out if the damage can be repaired by midday.'

‘The first thing, madam,’ said the Count, ‘is to find out whether there are any workmen in the neighbourhood, and on this point the Burgomaster can enlighten us,’ he added laughing, ‘at rather less cost to himself than he did half an hour ago.’

The worthy gentleman did not fail to answer, as is the habit of all municipal dignitaries, that everything that might be required was to be found in his town, it afterwards transpiring, as is usual in country places, that nothing whatever was available. However, there was a wheelwright in the town who was well spoken of and who had learnt his trade in Brussels and Paris.

‘Then let us have him awakened at once,’ said the Countess; ‘it will but cost us an extra guinea.’ But there were some trifling difficulties in the way, namely, that our friend was eighty years old, paralysed, and had been bedridden for eighteen months.

‘But at least you have a farrier?’ said the Count.

‘An excellent one,’ said the Burgomaster.

‘And not paralysed?’ said the Countess.

‘No, madam, seeing that he has started on a twenty-five mile journey this morning to attend the wedding of his sister, who is to be married to a master locksmith in four days’ time.’

‘Well, well, we must give up the farrier; can’t we at least get a saddler?’

‘Certainly. We have an admirable saddler; we are truly lucky to have so good a workman in a place like this. And he is well known throughout the district, so much so that the Baroness von Kalb, whose estate is a good thirty-five miles from here, sent to fetch him in her own carriage yesterday to do some repairs to a coach of hers.’

‘But how are we to manage, my dear Burgo-master?’ said the Countess. ‘I am beginning to get discouraged.’

‘In that case, madam, you must be patient.’

‘Patient! Good heavens!’

‘Ah, madam! without patience one could hardly get through life. But do not distress yourself, I will write to the two places where the workmen I mentioned now are, and also where I know a wheelwright can be found, and in time everything will be arranged.’

‘And can a letter, at least, be sent quickly?’

‘Yes, madam, by special post.’

‘And how often does your special post go?’

‘Every week.’

‘And when did it last leave?’

‘The day before yesterday.’

‘It is pretty expeditious, I suppose?’

‘Like all messengers, it travels on foot.’

‘On foot! O heaven!’

‘Ours was an excellent walker before he strained

his leg; but he is a determined fellow, and does not let that interfere with him: he always limps, but he will not let anyone take his place. What does it matter whether our townspeople get their news twenty-four hours earlier or later? There is more bad news than good, and that always comes too soon.'

The travellers looked at each other in consternation, without venturing to say a word.

'Come,' said the Burgomaster, 'let me appeal to you as husband and wife.'

The Count smiled and the Countess shrugged her shoulders.

'Am I to understand that your lordships are not married?' said the Burgomaster.

'But don't you see,' said the Countess, 'that we were going in opposite directions?'

'That proves nothing,' said the Burgomaster with a loud laugh. 'That is the way of domestic life in Paris, so they tell me. But no matter. Come, sir and madam, another little glass of this excellent *Steinwein*, and permit me to drink both your healths.'

'With all my heart, Burgomaster.'

'Alas! this will be my stirrup cup,' said the worthy fellow, 'for I shall presently have to depart to a country house about three leagues from here, where my services are needed, and it is with much

regret that I leave my house when it is so agreeably occupied.'

'What, are you going away?' said both the travellers together, 'and what is to become of us?'

'I hope,' said he, 'that your lordships may not find my poor home uncomfortable. You cannot stay too long for me, and if I could find you still here on my return . . .'

'Find us here, indeed!' cried the Countess. 'But, sir,' she said, recovering herself, 'you must surely be aware that there is nothing on earth so wretched as a woman who is stopped in the course of a long journey. My people are in front with my berlin and my horses, and my travelling companion has fallen behind, so that here I am alone except for any help that this child can give me. She is the nicest child in the world, but she is only fourteen; she has just left her village and knows nothing about anything.'

'Thank you, godmother,' said Martine.

'She knows no more what she does than what she says.'

'Thank you, godmother; that is something, at any rate.'

'Ah, madam,' said the Count, 'you would not want for applicants for the posts of all your missing servants. I will, if you will allow me, have a little talk with the Burgomaster. I fancy I shall get some

rather more satisfactory information than he has given us hitherto, and it will not be my fault if you are not soon free from all anxiety.'

'At any rate, I am relieved to think that in all this trouble I am giving you, your efforts on my behalf are also efforts on your own.'

'Madam, I had forgotten it.'

The Count accompanied the Burgomaster into his office, and remained there about an hour (which seemed a very long time to the Countess) making arrangements about workmen, lodging and expenses. After which he came back to the Countess, whom he found in the deepest dejection, which the poor lady did not attempt to conceal.

'Good heavens, madam!' said the Count, 'what has become of all that courage which I was so proud of having inspired in you?'

'But the Burgomaster is going away!'

'Are you then so deeply attached to our Burgomaster, madam?'

'Truly,' said she, beginning to laugh, though she continued to sigh, 'I do not know how I shall do without him.'

'Fortunate Burgomaster!' said the Count. 'I wish his appointment were for sale.'

'You may jest, but at this moment the most agreeable man in the world could not, for me, take the place of a Burgomaster.'

‘Well, well, madam, you may be reassured. I have just been with him, he has bequeathed me his authority, and you may assume that he stands before you.’

‘No, let us be serious. Nothing is more irritating than pleasantry when one is in distress. Tell me, is there any hope?’

‘Certainly, madam; at least, unless you give it up.’

‘I should certainly give it up if it were not for you. I have noticed that you have a sympathetic heart. You will not desert me, I am sure. You will not leave me at the mercy of these people, will you?’

‘No, madam! A thousand times no!’

‘What trouble and vexation I am causing you, and what a dismal encounter this has been for you! I have been more fortunate, for without you . . .’

‘Madam, you are tired and agitated. You have a cough. You are not well. Let me conduct you to your room, so that you may at least take a little rest while I give myself the pleasure of staying awake on your behalf.’

‘What an agreeable man!’ said Martine as she undressed her mistress. ‘How polite! And how obliging!’

‘True,’ said the lady, ‘but all men accustomed

to good Society have nearly the same manners and address.'

'Well, godmother, I never thought to feel envious of good Society. I am too fond of my own people; but if there are many gentlemen like yours . . .'

'Like mine, indeed! How the creature talks! Get away with you, you silly child.'

'But it isn't only to you that he behaves so nicely.'

'Really? One would think that you had already become intimately acquainted with him.'

'You must know that the Burgomaster . . . now, that is a fine man too!'

'A slightly different figure, perhaps.'

'Well, the Burgomaster had had got ready for him that beautiful room at the side here: that is the door. Lord! you should see how lovely it is—vases, portraits, pictures, crystal ornaments, carvings in wood and ivory—full of beautiful things like this one.'

'How the creature talks! Well, and what about the room and the Burgomaster? Go on please.'

'Yes, madam. Well then, this lovely room and everything was meant for him, and I had been given a poor little place, as was right. I was not complaining a bit, but he went on insisting that this big room was for me and the little one for him.'

'You little stupid, it is quite clear that it is only a month since I took you from your village; do you seriously think this was done for you?'

'For whom else?'

'For whom else, indeed? For me, you little fool.'

'Lord, that's a good one! So it was for your sake that he did not wish to spend the night near you; that's a fine sort of politeness.'

'And if I told you that it was an act of delicacy that I appreciate very much, you would understand me even less.'

'Delicacy?'

'Yes; do you know what that means?'

'Well—there now, I suppose it is like . . .'

'Well? Like what?'

'Like something that might be—well, that might be delicate.'

'Stupid creature! We do not speak the same language, so good night.'

Madam slept badly: she coughed a great deal; she felt so sorry for herself that it was not until nearly daylight that she could compose herself to slumber, and even then it was a feverish sleep, more calculated to exhaust than to refresh her. No matter, she was high-spirited and in a hurry: nothing could detain her. Start she must, and start she would. She called Martine, got up, sent to know whether the gentleman (for she did not

know his name) was awake, and if he would breakfast with madam before they resumed their journey.

'Journey? Cristi! there is a long spell before we get on our journey again. You heard what the Burgomaster said to you yesterday?'

'Oh, that was only the pompous sort of pleasantries that appeals to such people.'

'It was true, godmother, so true, that the gentleman, who does not sleep at night any more than a nightingale, got the names of all the workmen in the neighbourhood that might do, and sent a cart to fetch each of them with an order to come, just as if he had been the Burgomaster.'

'The assurance of the man!' said the Countess.

'Lord, madam! he knows how to get what he wants. You ask the footman who is acting as his servant.'

'Oh, I can very well believe it, just as if I heard him with my own ears.'

'He will tell you that the gentleman has a way with him indeed. Always lively, and I like that; his money always in his hand, and I like that; never at a loss, and I like that. You should hear him talk to everybody about the coach repairs as if he was a master of the trade, and I like that; and though he looks like a great lord, he is a man just the same—and I like that.'

'Really,' said the lady, who was not in the least vexed by this encomium, 'you seem to be quite devoted to him.'

'That's how it is, madam. Little Katel is like me: we heard all this as we were going about the house, and didn't I see him myself out of that window that looks on to the courtyard? Why, I would wager that you looked out of it yourself once or twice!'

'Indeed?'

'Why, godmother, 'tis quite natural; did you not see the man who was working with the others and showing them what to do?'

'I did.'

'And you called out to him with that gentle little voice of yours, "Make them work hard, good foreman, and I will reward you all." You did not know to whom you were speaking?'

'Well, how could I know?'

'I knew quite well because I could see him sideways. Well, I tell you it was him.'

'Was it, indeed?'

'Oh, it certainly was, because he looked at the young lady and me and laughed, and then he put his finger over his mouth to warn us.'

'Really, 'tis a very courteous gentleman.'

'And indeed, ma'am, if it hadn't been for him the carriages would still have been in a heap on

the ground—they would have had to be carried, not dragged away, so there! And there was a wheel broken in ours as well as in his, so what did he do? He measured one of yours and one of his, and they were the same size; so he took a good wheel off his and had it put in the place of our broken one. I heard the workmen laughing and saying behind his back, "If the gentleman always makes exchanges like this one he won't keep his money very long".'

'Indeed, I am really touched,' said the lady; 'this is not the way every one behaves.'

'That's the kind of man you want, godmother; I should so love to call him godfather!'

'Make haste now, and don't be silly; go at once and ask the gentleman to breakfast. And since you are so fond of him I will ask him to let you have breakfast with us. Besides, I feel so unwell that I should be very poor company. But you must behave yourself, you understand.'

'Of course I will, godmother; I would sew up my lips sooner than say anything I shouldn't.'

'When we are alone you know that I do not mind anything, and that now my parrot has flown away you can talk as freely as he did; but you seem to be flying away too.'

'Lord, madam, I was going to fetch our gentleman!'

‘Our gentleman, indeed! There’s a way to talk!’

‘Why, there now, I can see him out of the window. Sir, sir! . . . Ah, he has heard me! now you will see your workman.’

The Countess came forward, looking completely worn out.

‘Sir,’ said she, ‘I find a difficulty in talking . . .’

‘Ah, madam, I can hear it only too well.’

‘And even if it were not so, I should not know how to find words in which to express my gratitude.’

‘Madam, I only did my duty, and indeed, if the situation had been a little less annoying . . .’

‘It is thanks to you that I have been able to endure it. In fact, without you . . .’

‘Yes, sir, without you,’ interrupted Martine, ‘my mistress would have stayed a widow, for she was on her way to get married.’

The Count smiled.

‘And who asked you to speak, my girl?’

‘I beg your pardon, godmother,’ said the poor little creature, quite ashamed, ‘but I have always been told that there was nothing wrong in marriage, anyhow.’

‘Madam, I can well understand how impatient you must be, and yet I would answer for it that there is some one more impatient than you.’

'I thank you, sir, though, of course, you cannot know. But what of our carriages?'

'Madam, I have got some men to work upon them, and I have been working at them myself since daylight. The most awkward matter was that broken wheel, but fortunately we found its very sister, and so replaced it.'

'Yes, sir, I know it, and I ought to be as grateful to you as to a cripple who gives away his sound leg. But we cannot leave things like this.'

'I am afraid we must, madam, or it would be both carriages that would be left.'

'Sir, I am really upset by your kindness.'

'I should have liked to have done as much for the windows, but they can only be replaced in the first large town.'

'Ah, well,' said she, 'the blinds will serve our purpose. I am indifferent, provided I can start and reach my destination.'

'But you have taken cold, madam; you cannot treat yourself so.'

'I am not delicate.'

'Perhaps you also know that one of the springs has given way and that the workmen have not the means of reforging it.'

'Can we not do without it?'

'We could just manage to get the carriage into a condition to reach the next stage.'

'You are so very good, sir; try and have it arranged. I do not mind whether it is done well or badly. But tell me truly, how long will it take?'

'Madam, I am afraid to tell you.'

'I insist.'

'They talk of three days, madam.'

'O heaven! three days, and three days here!'

'Three days,' said Martine, jumping for joy. 'What a lovely three days we shall have!'

The Countess looked at her severely.

'I wish, for your sake,' went on the Count, 'that you could take this affair as light-heartedly as Fräulein Martine.'

'You see,' said the child, 'he knows my name already and I don't know his.'

Another reproving look from the Countess.

'If only you could arm yourself with a little patience,' continued the Count.

'Patience, sir,' answered the Countess, smiling; 'and who told you I was in need of it?'

'Madam, I must appeal to your own judgement.'

'Well, well, I do not know whether you have noticed it, but it seems to me, at least, that I have made great progress in this virtue since yesterday, and you may easily guess whom I have to thank for it.'

'I should be too flattered to think that my

example had counted for anything; but I can assure you that I should have given a much less edifying one to any other than to the Countess Von Blumm.'

'So you know my name?'

'That is one of the favours for which I am already indebted to Fräulein Martine.'

'Ah, miss!' said the Countess, 'I recognize you there.'

'But, madam, you would not have a poor girl like me refuse to answer his lordship. Tell me, sir, didn't you speak to me first? didn't you take my two hands and ask me with an air that I can't forget, "My little one"? Yes, it's like that you said, "How do you call the charming lady with whom I have just shaken hands?" And I said, "I call her my godmother, sir." But you weren't satisfied, were you now? And you wanted to know what her name was. Isn't that right?'

'Yes, my dear,' said the Count, 'allowing for a few faults in grammar.'

'Oh no, you said nothing about my grandma: it was all about my godmother. What a figure! What distinction! What an air! What features! And then—her pretty feet, her lovely hands, her magnificent hair, and many other things too; and then he said regretfully, "Ah! if only . . ."'

'Will you stop your nonsense, Martine? The

Count had no time to think about such things. You are putting words into his mouth.'

'No, madam,' said the Count, 'it is those perfections themselves that put the words into my mouth.'

'By the way,' said the Countess, to change the subject, 'where is that pretty little creature who looked after us so well last night? Is she not to breakfast with us?'

'No, madam,' said the Count; 'she confided to me this morning . . .'

'Ah, confidences already! . . .'

' . . . that to leave you more room in this house she would go and stay with her mother in a neighbouring estate of which her father is steward.'

'What dear good people,' said Frau Von Blumm; 'never have I been so kindly treated. But surely we are to see our excellent friend the Burgomaster, who was so excessively obliging.'

'Alas! he went off at dawn this morning.'

'Very well, we must speak to his wife.'

'She is ill, but there is his daughter, whom we could ask to come and see us.'

'To amuse us, I suppose; for a girl of sixteen must be rather a novice in the duties of a Burgomaster. But whom has he left in charge? did you not tell me it was you?'

'Yes, madam. He invested me with all the

authority of his position, and I may give such orders as I please. He has bequeathed me his powers, and I shall not, I hope, abuse them; but at least I shall fulfil his last injunction in doing everything I can to amuse you (these were his very words) and in assisting your prompt departure, and I will admit that if I were more certain of success in the former matter, you would find me rather less energetic in the latter.'

'Sir,' said the Countess, 'from any other than yourself these would be merely courteous words with which men have made us only too familiar, but from you they have a value that I know how to appreciate. But, none the less, we must both of us continue the journey.'

'I know it too well, madam, but necessity . . .'

'I know no necessity but that of getting away from here. I am only sorry to have had you as a companion in misfortune instead of having you now as a companion on my journey. But as it is, since Destiny is at our heels, I must go.'

'What, madam! in your present condition?'

'My real malady is this abominable delay.'

'You must not expect me to join you in abominating it, since you yourself ought to be thankful to it for giving you a few moments' respite. For after the dreadful shock that you must have suffered you are really your own enemy if you

insist on continuing your journey with a headache, a cold and a fever.'

'I must repeat, my lord, that this is but flattery. Dead or alive I must get on. Why should I stay here? I shall not feel any better. One is never comfortable when one feels ill; on the contrary, if I stay I shall suffer all the more, and from a worse complaint, I think, than all the others—impatience.'

'Madam, I feel it for you.'

'For yourself, no doubt, as well.'

'Not quite so acutely.'

'But here we both are, with our plans upset, our journeys interrupted, in a sort of captivity in fact; our situation is surely identical.'

'Ah, madam! with this difference, that I am in your company, whereas you are merely in mine.'

The day passed rather more quickly, thanks to the Count's conversation, assiduity and forethought, and also to Martine's ingenuousness, so much so that the lady was surprised that she herself had played so lively a part.

'The honour is yours,' she said to the Count. 'It is owing to you that I have been able to endure my impatience so patiently.'

Yet the irritation, depression and uneasiness of which she thought she had rid herself did not fail to return towards the evening; the Count noticed

it even before the sufferer herself, with a concern that flattered her even more than her condition distressed her.

‘Would you allow me to undertake to cure you now that I have dealt with your carriage?’

‘Certainly,’ she said. ‘You have been my wheelwright; you may as well be my doctor too.’

‘In that case let me offer you some tea of mine which I always carry with me. It is in a small case which Fräulein Martine will easily find in my room: I have seen nothing but good effects from it.’

Martine brought the case. The Count took out the herbs in question and, after having shown Martine how to infuse them, he retired.

‘Oh, my lady, what a strange doctor,’ said Martine; ‘he looks more like a young husband than a doctor. He can’t be more than twenty-five; he doesn’t carry a stick or wear a wig; he walks as lightly as a bride. He laughs and amuses you; he jokes about everything and forgets nothing, and—he behaves like a doctor, neither more nor less.’

‘Well, well, Martine, you may let yourself go while there is no one by.’

‘Come now, my dear godmother, don’t you like what he has given you? I am sure it is just nothing at all, and there is not a taste of medicine about it.’

‘How unfortunate,’ said the Countess laughing.

'But what will you say if his tea does do me good? And I feel already that it will.'

'There, did you ever see the like?' said the little maid, with perfect simplicity, 'and she has only smelt it and thought about it! There's a clever man for you! Truly, gentlemen like this are sorcerers such as I never did see.'

However, the tea was made, poured out and drunk; it was found excellent, and hardly had she taken her second cup than the Countess was asleep, and all her troubles, her vexation and her impatience were at rest as well. At last, after ten hours of peaceful sleep, Martine was summoned to help her mistress get up. The usual inquiries were made about the progress of the work.

'Oh, it's getting on, godmother, it's getting on, and I am so glad.'

'Perhaps that is a pity. I am afraid of things that are done so quickly.'

'The workmen are there,' said the little maid; 'can't you hear them hammering?'

'Yes, I am afraid that they may have to hammer so hard that they will smash everything.'

'Lord, godmother! you can't get much done without hammering. And there is my lord with them, and waking them up just as well as he sent you to sleep last night. He does not grudge the *schnapps* for them. One would say that he was in

near as much a hurry as you were yesterday. Why, to listen to you, you would sooner have started on foot than waited.'

'It is fever that makes me impatient like that, but I feel calmer to-day. The dear Count's tea did me all the good in the world. Good heavens, what would have become of me if I had not met him?'

'Why, my dear mistress, it is as if he had picked up our bad luck and turned it into good. But tell me, godmother, are all Counts like that?'

'Come now, no nonsense, you little wretch. Go down and say that I am afraid he will be tired or inconvenienced by staying all this time in the open air, and that I am very anxious to thank him for my cure. Will you remember that carefully?'

'Bless your heart, of course I shall remember. But stay—he might have heard you himself. Here he is.'

'Sir,' said the Countess, 'where you are concerned I can do nothing but spend my time expressing my gratitude.'

'Indeed, madam, you must permit the gratitude to come from me.'

'And for what?'

'For your being in good health. You are most certainly conferring a great honour on your doctor, of which he is more sensible than he can say.'

‘I am sure that your tea will make me able to defy every possible misfortune.’

‘Well, madam, here is the box; let me have it placed in your carriage.’

‘Indeed no, I beg you. Supposing you should want it on the way and I had taken it from you. The mere idea would deprive it of all its value for me.’

‘No,’ said the Count, ‘it did you good. I ask no further service from it. But allow me to retrieve a very pleasant travelling companion, though I am afraid you may not get much benefit out of him.’

‘And why, pray?’

‘Because I fear he does not speak your language.’

‘Whom do you mean?’ said the Countess.

‘Virgil,’ said the Count, producing a small Elzevir from the box. ‘I have always loved him; but I am afraid that after this,’ he said, with a look that made his thought abundantly clear, ‘he will get much less attention from me.’

‘Godmother,’ said Martine, interrupting them, ‘here are the workmen, who say they have finished and want you to give them something.’

‘But is the work really finished?’ answered the Countess. ‘Is it properly done? Can I safely start? What do you think, my lord? And is the spring you spoke of replaced?’

'No; I have already had the honour of telling you that it cannot be replaced until to-morrow or the day after. But out of consideration for your impatience we have fixed a strong piece of wood as well as we could along the broken curve; it will certainly support the weight of the carriage, but will make rather rougher travelling.'

'That, sir, is precisely what I am afraid of; so let us wait for the spring.'

'I did not dare to suggest it,' said the Count, 'for fear that I should seem to be giving you interested advice.'

'Besides,' she added, 'I had fever yesterday, and in spite of all the science of Æsculapius, it might come back to-morrow.'

'Madam, Æsculapius himself is afraid it might, and if he had any authority over you, he would certainly not allow you to do anything in haste.'

'On the other hand, a further reason for hastening my departure is that I am detaining you.'

'Let me reassure you, madam. You may detain me, if you please, for the rest of my life.'

'I have also to make you atone for a rather hasty judgment.'

'Hasty?' he asked; 'and about what?'

'About this travelling companion,' said she, indicating the Virgil, 'from whom you thought I would get no benefit.'

‘Ah, madam, forgive me if, at first glance, I took you for a woman.’

‘And what do you mean by that, may I ask?’

‘For a charming person, but one on whom my friend would use his Latin in vain.’

‘Since you sentence me to keep my room, shall we share your friend and read some of him together?’

Thereupon she opened the Virgil at random and happened precisely on the fourth book of the *Æneid*.

‘Ah,’ said she, ‘this is where women learn to beware of men.’

‘I agree,’ said the Count, ‘we must all blush for *Æneas*. But it is not everybody that has such important business, or at least we must hope that the gods do not meddle with every one’s affairs.’

‘You are surprised at my knowledge; but you must know that what made me learn Latin was that I could not bear to read Virgil in French. It is a disgrace to France that the most exquisite of poets has, until now, met with none but such execrable translators.’

‘True,’ said the Count, ‘he has always fallen into bad hands until the Abbé Desfontaines.’

‘I include him too,’ added the Countess; ‘how do you suppose a pedant could understand a poet?’

‘Well, you may be satisfied. An avenger of Dido

will soon be born, and he whom you see before you . . .’

‘What! Do you suggest yourself?’

‘Alas, so much glory is not for me; but I am relying on a dear school friend I had at the Collège de la Marche, in Paris, the year before Mahon, a boy from Auvergne, who at fifteen years old fell in love with Virgil’s poetry.’

‘In love at fifteen! He is a little young for the Muses.’

‘Up till now he is their most favoured lover. All the Latin world already looks upon him with envious eyes. One would have said that Virgil himself had declared him his heir.’

‘Then he will be very rich.’

‘And the proof would be that one cannot read a passage from either of them, on what may seem the most ordinary subject, without being amazed at the impression they make.’

‘I assume then that your little Virgil of the countryside was born affectionate as well as witty, and kind as well as clever.’

‘If he had been at the convent with you instead of at college with me, you could not describe him better.’

‘You must agree,’ said the Countess, ‘that wit and sensibility are two of the noblest gifts of heaven; without them there would be no poets.’

‘If you had to make a choice,’ said the Count, ‘which would you rather have?’

‘One need but be in the possession of wit to know that one would not prefer it. I think that sensibility is of a far finer quality, and don’t you think, as I do, that feeling is the soul of thought?’

After the interesting discovery which they had both just made, that a man of fashion and a lovely lady may occasionally be absolved from ignorance, our friends began to look at each other with different eyes. Not that they had not already read deeply in each other’s eyes; but it gladdens the heart to find that one is not deceived, and sharpens the vision for further delightful discoveries. Thus their acquaintance became, I cannot say daily, but hourly, more intimate, and though Latin is not quite so persuasive as Greek, they both privately acknowledged their indebtedness to Virgil for his services. However, the hour for retirement arrived, and our lovely invalid took her tea, dismissed her reader, and went to bed pretty well reconciled to anything that might prevent her from resuming her journey on the following day.

‘Godmother,’ said Martine, as she woke up her mistress towards nine in the morning, ‘come to the window and look at our carriage. It is mended finely: the spring has arrived, and you can’t see

anything wrong. And the kind gentleman who is always there—since daylight too! He must love you very much, and he hasn't taken long about it; he has had the four wheels greased for you so that they will run better.'

'Silence, you little fool,' said the lady impatiently; 'go and tell him to come up.'

He appeared and gave an account of his work. She thanked him, but with much less warmth and sincerity than on the previous day, and in a rather more dejected tone.

'Are you not so well?' said the Count.

'I am not sure; but the sky is overcast and the air is colder. I am so sensitive to changes in the weather. And after having been three or four days indoors as I have, I don't know whether I should do well to take the risk. You are smiling; I suppose you think me very nervous.'

'You will never be as nervous for yourself as others will be for you—perhaps even because of you,' he added, lowering his voice.

'And then,' continued the lady as if she had not noticed his remark, 'there are the broken windows, which will let all the winds of heaven in upon me, and my cold of yesterday has not gone yet,' she said with a slight cough that came, I think, from her heart.

'Oh, as far as that goes,' said Martine, 'the

windows have been mended with paper, and Fräulein Katel stuck it on with her own hands like drawings in a book.'

'That was very clever of her,' said Frau von Blumm, shrugging her shoulders.

'Why, faith, madam, it was no other than my lord himself who showed her how to do it.'

'I don't know why, but that little creature irritates me.'

'Ah, godmother, she is really very nice; if you had seen how hard she worked and how she looked at the Count to make sure he was pleased, and how often she asked in her little soft voice, "am I doing it right?" and how she made haste so that you might get off at once . . .'

'She must be in a great hurry; but she will have to give me one more day at least, because I feel I need it. Besides, windows stuck together with paper will not hold, and draughts are the death of me.'

'How are we going to manage to get to the wedding?' said Martine.

'You are being foolish again, miss. My lord, I blush to be so timid and so vexatious, but you encourage my weaknesses by giving way to them.'

'Command me, madam; your orders need no excuses.'

'Would it be possible to send for three new

windows that would protect me properly? They can probably be got in some town within reach, and you, who have already so many acquaintances in the neighbourhood . . .’

The Count, without replying, went to take the measurements of the windows to be replaced; he then despatched a small cart to bring them back, and returned without delay, having hardly left the Countess time to give Martine a sound scolding.

So here is another day—gained or lost, which shall we call it?

What should they do? They took up Virgil once more, always more delightful to re-read than to read; they followed the loves of Æneas and Dido, so ardent on one side and so cold on the other; they followed them to the hunt and even to the fatal cave. Mercury soon appeared, and though he is not usually a wet-blanket for lovers, the Countess let the book fall from her hands.

‘That is enough for to-day,’ said the Count. ‘Leave him where he lies.’

‘Not Virgil,’ said the Countess, ‘but the hero. I cannot endure to think of a woman so unhappy and so lovable, and even less of a lover so adored, so cold and so ungrateful. Somehow it makes me shiver.’

The Count was careful to use everything she

said for his own advantage, and becoming more and more confident, he said:

‘If you want other books, there is a large library at hand which the Burgomaster left for our use; but unfortunately the light is going, so that we could not take advantage of it until to-morrow, and to-morrow . . .’ he said lightly.

‘Well, why not to-morrow?’ answered the Countess.

‘Yes, but supposing the windows arrive during the night?’

‘Ah, yes! if they arrive, I must go.’

‘You are dying to be off,’ said he with a look which seemed to ask if this were really true.

‘Can you not see it in my face?’ answered she, with a smile.

‘At least I try not to see it. *Ah! if only* . . . Still, I will go and see how the work is getting on, so that, if it be possible, there shall be nothing but your own inclinations to detain you, and then I would suggest . . .’

‘What? That I should start? How can you think of such a thing in my condition!’

‘Your doctor would hardly be likely to advise you to do anything so rash! No, but to try your strength . . .’

‘Well?’

‘We will venture on a little excursion, which we

can very easily do, as all the servants and horses in the house are at my orders.'

'That sounds indeed tempting, but . . .'

'But . . . you are in such a hurry, I suppose.'

'Still the same refrain: one would think you wanted me to go.'

'Come. I will go and speak to the little Mayor-ess . . .'

'I have quite a horror of that young lady.'

'And I will tell her that if you have not gone to-morrow morning a carriage is to come for you; but, of course, you are in such a hurry,' he added in a rather more lively—not to say forward—tone, and with an air of looking for, or rather with the hope of finding, a favourable reply in the Countess's eyes. Nevertheless, upon the repetition of this insinuation, the Countess assumed, or thought she ought to assume, a slightly graver demeanour.

The Count, who paid as much attention to the most imperceptible changes in her charming countenance as he might have done to every line in the book of his destiny, was afraid he might have pushed his jesting a little too far. He thought that the lady must have discovered in his attitude something of an arrogance and assurance which the most kindly disposed of women find it difficult to forgive; his case was like that of a vessel which runs the risk of foundering in the most favourable wind

by carrying too much sail. So the poor man, carefully concealing his concern, bethought him of the slightest word or gesture or expression that might have shocked the dear Countess. In his imagination she became as stern as he had hitherto found her gracious; he exaggerated everything into an outrage and was terrified of everything he might do. For a new-born passion has a most tender conscience, and love thrives on scruples while awaiting better things. What should he do now? It would have been too risky to maintain the same tone, while to change it would have been an impeachment of his conduct. An explanation would have been clumsy—indeed, nothing is worse than that. A clumsy lover is little better than a fool. So the Count considered that his best course would be to pretend to have noticed nothing, to take a very respectful leave of his lady, and go in the usual way to see to the work that was being done on the carriages.

The Countess, on her side, was not without a touch of annoyance at Herr von Glücksleben's light-hearted demeanour. She felt at the bottom of her heart that she forgave it, but she could not make up her mind whether she ought to forgive herself. The Count had certainly adopted a rather more lively and more confident attitude; but had not an occasional soft smile, a soft look, a soft

word absolved him for this liberty, which indeed he had seen clearly that he was not forbidden to take. Surely it was for her to be grateful to him for having gone no farther. It is true that the Count might have thought her a flirt, but she knew she was not, for a flirt is incapable of affection. The flirt may very well look as if she were letting herself go while she is in perfect control of herself, but our Countess was not very well acquainted with this fact, at least not as well as she would have liked to be. But what would the Count think of her change of tone, her affected coldness at the end of the conversation? Would not this have the effect of damping his ardour? And this would be a melancholy reward for all his kindness and care. Besides, why should she attach so much importance to a matter that did not deserve it? That would be the merest prudery; and if the Count could read her soul he would see how very far she was from being a prude.

Thus the dear Countess found more than a little fault with her own conduct, and accused herself to excuse him. While she was thus a prey to all the vacillations of an uneasy heart, the kind-hearted and cheerful little Martine came in, skipping and laughing in her usual way, and the Countess, who did not know upon whom to visit her ill-humour, turned upon the poor child.

'Really, my young lady . . .'

'What, a young lady at this time of day?'

'No, I am not laughing. You are so silly, so indiscreet, that I am continually blushing for it.'

'But how does that happen, my dear godmother? for I have already noticed it, especially when the Count is there, and even now, as I mentioned his name, there is madam blushing, as if he was not a very handsome gentleman, a very polite gentleman, and a very nice gentleman, and did not love my mistress very much.'

'When I say I blush, it is for you, miss.'

'No, no, madam, it is indeed because of him; why there you are blushing more and more!'

'You little fool! You repeat in front of him all the wild things he may have said behind my back. You say just what comes into your head. You put your own words into his mouth, and God knows whether there is a word of truth in all you say.'

'Ah, madam, do you think I tell lies! Me! to my dear godmother! There isn't any wicked sin I wouldn't sooner commit than that.'

'It is fortunate,' said the Countess, shrugging her shoulders, 'that the creature is talking to me!'

'And—if you only knew.'

'What?'

'But I mustn't tell you.'

'I am glad to hear it.'

'I went into the Count's room this morning.'

'Into his room indeed! I am ashamed of you, miss; you have been abominably brought up!'

'But, madam, he was not there.'

'That makes it almost worse.'

'Certainly, I wished he had been there. But, at any rate, I found a fine sheet of paper which he had begun to write on before he went off on his horse. Why he must know everything: he writes like a schoolmaster. Do but look at this.'

'I am more than ashamed of you! You have done a very wicked thing. I am not laughing, miss, do you understand me? It is very wrong indeed, to look at anyone's papers, turn them over and read them!'

'As for that, madam, you may be quite sure that I read nothing, because I can only read printing.'

'No matter, you have done very wrong all the same. Go at once and put that back from where you took it, and for heaven's sake take the greatest care that no one sees you going in. That shows you that you have behaved badly, since you cannot let anyone see you. But—no,' she added, after reflecting a moment, 'you would only commit some further folly. Leave it with me and go and make quite sure that you can put it back without being seen. Go and look about you carefully. Oh, how ashamed I should be if you were discovered!'

Malicious minds might suspect that the lovely preacher's discourse on the subject of curiosity was more especially intended for the use of her maid, for no sooner had Martine turned her back than the bolt was shot, no doubt in case the Count should come in unexpectedly. And the dear lady would have deserved all the more credit for not reading the letter now that she had managed to get an undisturbed opportunity of doing so. However that may be, here it is . . .

'Wednesday . . .

'My letter of last Sunday, my dear Father, gave you a tolerably particular account of my accident, my meeting with the charming traveller, our mutual difficulties, her distress of mind, the comical little episode of the worthy Burgomaster, etc. I first thought that, as far as my pretty companion in misfortune was concerned, the affair would call for no more than the display of a little courtesy, the utterance of a few polite nothings, and the performance of a few trifling services. But I must now open my heart to my dear Father, to the kind confidant of my most secret thoughts. I begin to fear that the accident may have consequences, and especially to be cast down at the thought that it is I alone that will feel the effects. You have often reproached me with a coldness and indifference

towards women which, so you have said, is as little suited to my age as love would be to yours. Oh, my dear Father, how greatly you would find me changed; but how little surprised you would be if you could see the author of the miracle!

‘Picture to yourself not the most striking, but, what is infinitely more precious, the most alluring creature that you have ever seen. A soul made visible rather than a quality of beauty. That is what moved me at the first sight of her, and her expression in some measure prevented me from looking at her features; but not for long. None could be indifferent to those lovely tresses whose silvery fairness contrasts so deliciously with the colour of her eyebrows and her eyes; to that delicate complexion whose whiteness is whiter than purity; to those glowing cheeks, flushed—one can but believe it—with the hue of innocence. Even you yourself, my Father, if you could look upon that brow, clear as simplicity itself, that expressive mouth which seems to have spoken before the lips have parted, those eyes, as blue as pansies, that shed more light than they reflect, her nose, which by its shape and delicacy, a subtlety of contour all its own, seems to concentrate all the charms of her countenance, her chin even, that one cannot but contemplate for its own sake, and also for

the promise of the assembled loveliness about it. You laugh, my dear Father; yes, you are laughing, I can see you from here. You are saying, "My poor Adrian has taken leave of his senses", and you add, like every father, "it will pass", and I tell you it will not. If you could see Frau von Blumm, the charm that extends to the smallest details of her person, her graceful, rounded waist, which I held for a moment in my arms when I lifted her from her carriage, her modest countenance, the elegance of her movements, all the splendid graceful lines of her figure, which in painting are the attributes of Goddesses alone. Yes, I tell you once more, you would be struck, as was your son, by an indefinable something, a quality at once of the Court and of the country, an elegant simplicity, a restrained animation which is the characteristic of her demeanour; by her sylph-like body, for which nature has used just so much matter as was necessary to display its grace and house its soul . . . Indeed, as I write to you about her, my feelings carry me away. Forgive me; there is no one to whom I can speak of her except yourself. Why must I soon see her depart to meet a husband whom I detest without knowing him? Ah, my dear Father, I deserve a great deal for serving her so faithfully, for removing, as I am doing, the

obstacles that are preventing her departure, for not following her to the end of the world, and for not forgetting my last engagements! You will understand me, my Father. *Ah! if only . . .*

Here the letter ended.

We shall not permit ourselves to say whether the Countess allowed herself to cast an eye upon it. However, the reader will take note of the fact that when she heard Martine coming up the stairs the bolt was drawn back, and that the Countess went to meet her, carrying the letter in her hand, and that the girl noticed that she seemed distinctly happier, brighter and more amiable than she had been a few moments before. *Honi soit qui mal y pense*. That does not suggest that she had read the letter, but equally it does not suggest that she had not done so.

'Well, you silly little creature,' said the Countess, 'Is not the Count in his room?'

'No, indeed, godmother. There, look down at the bottom of the yard, you will see him busy over our carriage.'

'But the servant who is attending on him here, isn't he there?'

'He's gone off to the Castle safe enough.'

'Is the Count's door open?'

'Wide open.'

'Has anything in the room been touched?'

'Not so much as a curl-paper.'

'Where was the letter?'

'On the table.'

'At the side or in the middle?'

'In the middle: you can see where it was from the marks of the powder; but what difference does that make, godmother?'

'A great deal, you little fool! don't you see that if the Count came back and found his letter in another place he would know that it had been touched, and he would certainly think it had been read.'

'But, my dear godmother, if a letter has been touched, is that the same as if it had been read?'

'Very much the same, in point of fact,' said the Countess, smiling and apparently thinking about other women's curiosity. 'Now then, be quick, some one may come, Martine, so put the letter back. Was it like that?' said the Countess again, looking closely at the table.

'Yes, exactly, godmother; but look out of the window—the Count is turning round and coming back.'

'Quick, quick, we must run!'

And they fled from the scene like frightened doves.

The Count soon came upstairs, a little uneasy

as to his reception. But instead of a frowning face, he found a smiling friendly one; he assumed that this gracious demeanour was simply an acknowledgement of the trouble he had taken to hasten the departure which at the bottom of his heart he was dreading.

‘How kind you are!’ said the Countess, ‘and how tiresome I have been! And it is all my fault: but I am not unappreciative, and I have often looked at you from the window and said to myself, “if there were only some means of showing my gratitude for all this trouble.”’

‘Ah, madam, if I dared, I would suggest one that I should find very welcome.’

‘Pray tell me.’

‘It would be to postpone as long as may be the occasion for profiting by what I have done.’

‘I don’t know what you think about it,’ said the Countess, ‘but as things have fallen out you might well believe that I was doing so.’

‘Perhaps I am taking undue advantage of a hint of kindness,’ said the Count, ‘but pardon me a curiosity that every instant increases and every look justifies.’

‘I should be very ungrateful or very disingenuous if I did not.’

‘Are you in a great hurry?’ said he, looking at her with a tender solicitude.

‘Indeed I am,’ she answered; ‘in fact, under Providence, that was the first word that Martine said to you. It could hardly be otherwise, for the affair upon which I am engaged is of the first importance!’

‘Good heavens!’ cried the Count, ‘every one has such affairs, but,’ he added in a tone that left no doubt as to his meaning, ‘we do not always allow them to take the first place.’

‘Very well, sir: the flattering—indeed, I may say, touching, attentions that you have shown me have won you my sincere regard, and it becomes my duty to take you into my entire confidence. I am called to Prague by important business. But you are smiling?’

‘Smiling, madam? And who could help smiling at the charm with which you speak, and at that delightful blush which would adorn your loveliness were that possible.’

‘There is no reason to smile, or to blush,’ she went on. ‘Martine has told you: I am going to be married.’

Whereupon she looked at the Count and the Count at her, and then after a moment’s silence on both sides, which certainly did not mean that they had nothing to say:

‘Ah, madam,’ said the Count sighing. ‘I dread lest you may marry beneath you.’

‘And why?’ asked the Countess. ‘If birth and fortune count for anything, there is no inequality.’

‘In these two matters there may be none,’ said the Count, ‘but there is a third in which there cannot—I say cannot—fail to be. Are you at least loved as you deserve?’

‘He does not yet even know me and, if you can believe me, I am only marrying to give pleasure to one from whom I no longer wish to be separated: the perfect friend and perfect sister!’

‘Surely an extremity of kindness!’

‘I was brought up from my earliest youth in her company. We were nourished at the same breast, for my mother died in childbirth, and her mother, kindest of women, and the intimate friend of my own, wished to nurse me as well as her own daughter, who was born on the same day as myself. Since then we have always had the same governesses and been at school at the same convents.’

‘I begin to understand your determination to continue, as you began, in each other’s company.’

‘You would understand it even better if you knew her. I must tell you that our friendship, which had been provided for before we were born, and which, as it were, came into being when we did, grew up with us, for so I may describe it, until we were eighteen, when, for family reasons, we unhappily had to part. A worthy uncle, who

acted as my guardian, was obliged to return to the Palatinate. He took me with him and married me to one of his best friends. He was a very rich man of the noblest birth and the highest character, but much older than I, and much shaken in health. I nursed him, looked after him and even mourned him as a father. I lost him two years ago, and there was no offspring of my marriage. These two years have been spent in constantly recurring disputes and difficulties, most of which arose from the considerable fortune which my husband had managed to leave me, to the extreme annoyance of his relations. At last, in this case at any rate, justice prevailed, and as soon as I found myself mistress of my fortune as of my person, my first thought was of my honoured nurse and my affectionate friend. My friend, on her side, to make sure that we should never be separated, suggested that I should marry her brother. He is of a previous marriage and ten years older than she . . . He has a fairly high position in the Service, he will have an ample fortune, and he has pestered her to make me marry him. And . . . well, and I consented. You seem surprised; but if you knew my friend!

‘I might have married her, perhaps, but I am quite certain I should not have married anyone else out of a feeling of friendship for her.’

‘She describes him to me as a man of dignified

appearance, much gravity of demeanour and firmness of character, methodical, of regular habits, serious, with great ability in affairs, thinking of nothing but his duty, and likely to play a considerable part in the world. But since there is always something on the other side, and my friend is incapable of dissimulation, she adds that he will perhaps be slightly inclined to be jealous.'

'But madam . . .'

'Well, sir?'

'A thousand pardons. I had vowed to say nothing, and I will keep my vow.'

'Ah, I can guess what you mean. You are thinking about this matter of jealousy. That could not frighten me: my friend has entire possession of my heart. And the sweet reflection that I am again coming under friendship's roof (for I thank heaven I have never known any other feeling), that I am to spend my life in the company of her who fed me with her milk and her with whom I shared it, made me put everything else on one side.'

'No, I don't like it,' said the Count. 'Can friendship, that I had always looked upon as an enlightenment to the understanding, can even friendship act unwisely?'

'How, unwisely?'

'What, madam! persuade you to marry someone that you do not know?'

'One gets on so ill in that situation with those whom one thought to know best of all, that very often the wisest method to adopt is . . .'

'Truly, madam, that is certainly not yours.'

'No, sir, it is to leave a little to chance, to arm oneself, at need, with a certain amount of tact and a great deal of resignation; to study the character of the man who is to be one's husband so as to adapt one's own to his; to expect everything and be afraid of nothing, and finally to believe that a peaceful heart, a gentle temper and an irreproachable behaviour must banish every storm.'

Herr von Glücksleben remained for a time without speaking.

'You do not answer, sir.'

'Madam, I am still listening.'

'And pray what are you listening to?'

'To the thoughts that your words have inspired.'

'Do you blame me?'

'Yes, madam, so far as an admirer may do so.'

'A truce to compliments; explain yourself.'

'Do you wish it? I will begin by most heartily commending that fine and kindly feeling which rules your whole existence and which suggests the generous determination to give your whole life in payment for the attentions which you received in your earliest years. But do you owe so much to the sister that you must needs marry her brother, or to

the stepmother that you must marry her stepson? You do not know this brother and stepson, nor, indeed, do I. But my dear Countess,' he said, concealing an affectionate concern under a mask of pleasantry, 'let me tell you what I think of him, and let me play what they call in Rome the Devil's Advocate, while you are defending a proposal for his sanctification.'

'He is yours until the signature of the contract.'

'I thank you. I shall judge him by the very words used by his sister: "A man of dignified appearance," she said, "and gravity of demeanour": I suspect these qualities when they call for comment, especially from a sister. A touch of them is necessary, but not too much, and they are not wanted at all in the family circle. She talks about "firmness of character": this is the phrase a sister will use for a brother's want of breeding; "of a serious nature": this, in such circumstances, is but a synonym for low spirits. "Thinking of nothing but his duty" means that he despises pleasures, and "inclined to jealousy"—to jealousy! Did I hear aright, madam?'

'Alas, you did, sir,' said the Countess smiling; 'but once again, what does that matter to me, whose sole aim is to behave as well as I can?'

'And you think that is an adequate defence against a jealous nature, my dear Countess? Why,

the Wise Virgins themselves would find the task hopeless. You do not seem to realize that a man is jealous not because he has any reason to be, but because he is jealous by nature. Your conduct towards such a man may be exemplary: that will avail you nothing. It is enough that you are beautiful, witty, friendly, kind, and courteous—in possession, in fact, of all those defects which I see in you, and others whose existence I suspect.’

‘You will make me wish I had them.’

‘There is nothing that a jealous man will not seize upon to increase his torments, except possibly something that might justify them; for though he may appear extremely alert, he is usually blind to what is really going on and lives in an imaginary world of his own.’

‘Really, my lord, you should think more than once about unsettling a poor woman over a matter that is decided; and what has this unhappy man done to you?’

‘What has he done to me, madam? I look upon him in advance as a personal enemy. He may make you unhappy.’

‘I ought, perhaps, to be angry, but I offer you my acknowledgements.’

‘I wish I were wrong, but I fear it.’

‘And why should you think so?’

‘For this reason. He has never seen you; it is not

long since he became aware that you possessed a large fortune, and it is since then he has pestered his sister to talk to you about him. You give way, you consent, and the affair is concluded.'

'You proceed rather fast! It is true that all the arrangements are made, that I have nothing to do but to reach my friend as soon as may be, and that even the slightest delay might upset everything, since her brother has to leave at once to join his regiment.'

'Very well,' said the Count smiling, 'wait until he comes back.'

'I should have to wait a long time, for he is stationed in the remotest parts of Transylvania.'

'I should wait all the same.'

'He is ordered to take part in the Turkish campaign.'

'I should still wait.'

'No, truly, there is not a moment to be lost, and that is why I was using every means in my power to urge the postilions forward, fearing that I could never give them enough money, or provide them with enough brandy . . . and you see the result.'

'And you, my dear Countess, see how I feel for you.'

'But I need not tell you,' said the lady, 'that my confidences are not altogether disinterested, and that I await yours.'

‘Really,’ said the Count, ‘I am amazed to find that our circumstances come into almost as close contact as our carriages, and you will be surprised to hear that my story is the male counterpart of yours.’

‘You must tell it to me, whatever it be, if only to set my mind at rest.’

He was about to begin when Martine came running in.

‘Godmother, godmother,’ said she, all out of breath, ‘do please come and see the lovely cabriolet and beautiful horses that are waiting downstairs. I asked the coachman whom they were for, and he answered that they were for the Count and the Countess.’

‘There now, one might almost say . . .’

‘One might indeed,’ replied Martine, ‘and that might make one think; not that it wouldn’t be very nice I’m sure . . .’

‘You must forgive her, Count. She is such a good girl, and was in such a hurry to fall in love with you. But what can this carriage mean?’

‘I will explain. I have already boasted of my new office.’

‘And what is it, please?’

‘That of Burgomaster.’

‘The excellent fellow! I cannot think of him without gratitude, and I should be really sorry to leave without seeing him.’

‘Indeed, he is profoundly devoted to you.’

‘I am so delighted at his sudden affection for me: it makes matters so much easier. But this cabriolet . . .’

‘You must know, then, that he enjoys the confidence and is honoured with the friendship of the lord of these parts, and on the strength of this he exercises a sovereign authority over a Castle that you may see from your windows, a mile or so from here, beyond the great avenue.’

‘Well, and how has he displayed his sovereignty?’

‘He has placed the Castle, garden, park, forest, servants, carriages and horses, gamekeepers, dogs, guns, in short, everything at my disposal on the understanding that they are placed at yours.’

‘Who could have expected such a thing?’ said the Countess; ‘but what will the good man himself think about it?’

‘That is the last thing that need trouble you: he told me that he was merely carrying out the intention of the worthy Count whom he has the honour to represent, Herr . . . Herr . . . they told me his name, but I cannot recall it.’

‘How could you forget such a thing?’

‘Easily . . . Everything goes out of my head at present. But what I most clearly recollect is that he is a gentleman of the old school, who was once passionately devoted to women and is now their

disinterested admirer. Unfortunately he is fifty miles away in Bohemia, I believe, or Silesia, and when he learns what Goddess (I do but borrow the words of the worthy Burgomaster) has for a brief moment shed her glory in these parts, he will never console himself for not having been here to worship her.'

'What a pity time is so short.'

'If it is a pity,' said the Count smiling, 'it need not be so short.'

'Are the repairs to the carriage getting on well?'

'Very well.'

'But I take it that they are not finished?'

'No, and they will even last as long as you wish.'

'But I do beg you to believe that I am in a terrible hurry; you must not misunderstand me, and you are in a hurry too.'

'More of a hurry than I could wish, and less than I ought to be.'

'Very well, let us go out in the cabriolet. Shall we start at once?'

'I am at your orders; you must just let me take a look at your carriage.'

'You talk so incessantly of my carriage. I am beginning to grow tired of it.'

'I, on the other hand, have a considerable regard for your carriage so long as it remains in repose.'

‘And yet you are continually looking after the repairs and, what is more, working on them yourself, to get it sooner ready for action.’

‘Indeed, I would work on it all my life. Sometimes, it is true, Penelope’s artful device comes into my mind; but if I were to give way to the temptation, what would your bridal impatience have to say to that?’

‘My bridal impatience!’ repeated the Countess, shrugging her shoulders. ‘I would try and conceal it. Come, let us go.’

They got into the cabriolet, and in less than a quarter of an hour they reached the edge of a wood whose gloomy majesty so impressed them that they stayed their course forthwith. This noble relic of the ancient forests of the Druids was undamaged by the passage of time or by the hands of men, and its solidity, which seemed to increase with the passing of the centuries, promised that twenty more generations of man should still enjoy the shade that it had already cast on twenty generations that have passed away like its own dead leaves.

‘Hail, venerable contemporaries of our proud forefathers!’ said the Count, who was quite carried away by the sight, ‘who, like them, never yielded to another’s will. Your outline varying with the strange impulses of your nature, your roots that

touch the nethermost parts of the world, your summits lost among the clouds, your thick locks that have never known the shameful touch of steel, your powerful limbs that have never been bent nor straightened by art or violence, awake in me recollections of those noble comrades of Arminius, who remained free among a horde of conquered nations and still defied the power of Rome.'

The Countess applauded an enthusiasm which she shared. Thereafter, as they wandered slowly through this once sacred wood, deeply moved by the awe that we all naturally feel towards things that time has spared, they found all manner of gardens, thickets, orchards, kitchen-gardens and grassy lawns ranged in terraces on the slopes of a smiling hill, exposed to the softest rays of the morning sun, among masses of rare trees and graceful shrubs which lay in their path. At last they came upon the flat balustrade of the Castle roof, built on a levelled space half-way up the hill, but of an irregular shape in which art had never lost regard for nature. They reached it by winding paths between blossoming hedges, and at first they found nothing very imposing; but they soon came to the conclusion that this was why the prospect was so delightful, for taste and splendour are unhappily nearly always at variance. The buildings

were only half visible among the roses, lilac and jasmine that surrounded them, and hardly failed to replace any beauties that they concealed. Countless rivulets, each more limpid than its neighbour, fell in a thousand cascades into a lovely lake that lapped the walls of the Castle and then flowed onwards to a magnificent pasture land where they were split into small canals, whose courses had been traced by the invisible hand whose skill no art can equal. They gazed far and wide over the vast extent before them, beyond the groups of trees that varied the prospect, and the numerous flocks and herds that gave it movement and life, until their vision reached a line of distant hills where woods, steeples, vineyards, hamlets and castles, whose disposition and variety seemed destined to delight the eye, completed the landscape.

The Countess, moved, like all fine natures, by the sight of the appealing beauties of the country, which indeed offer so much food for poetry and reflection to those who can understand them, stood still for a few moments as if lost in ecstasy; then, giving rein to her admiration, she said to the Count:

‘You must agree that all landscape gardens are pitiful compared with this. Nature, the unknown Genius of the world, has been at the pains of arranging this garden, or, rather, has allowed it to

arrange itself. Beside Nature, men are children who spoil everything: their touch is weak and clumsy. How well she knows, how well she prepares everything that we need! But most of us do not believe it: we know nothing, and we dare not trust her.'

'More than that,' said the Count, 'we run away from her. Why, we invent a thousand devices and a thousand excuses for imprisoning ourselves at a distance from her. It is true that our bonds are imaginary, but our imprisonment is none the less real; for caprices as well as laws can be our masters.'

'I leave the philosophy of the matter to you, my dear Count: it is not for a woman to rise so high. Finches do not follow the flight of eagles,' she added with a touch of malice. 'But how good it would be to live here, would it not?'

'How good it is to be here,' said the Count, 'since you like it.'

'But what do you think of it yourself? You sigh, what is the matter?'

'I am sad when I think upon this lovely kindly Nature, to whom you have but now rendered so just a homage, who offers to every one of us the only true pleasures, the only true benefits; and now we are leaving her to go in pursuit of illusions. We can never grow contented with what is good

for us, and we may be often compared to a sensitive soul . . .’ He stopped and looked at her.

‘You do not finish . . .’

‘. . . who leaves everything, abandons everything to . . .’

‘To . . .?’

‘. . . go and marry some one whom she does not know simply because she thinks she ought.’

‘Still harping on the unknown gentleman whom you are kind enough not to like!’

‘Oh, less than anyone.’

‘By the way, you owe me your story. I feel the same interest in it as you displayed in mine.’

‘Does your ladyship wish me to tell it? It certainly will not weary you for long. You must know, then, that I, the traducer of unknown men, am myself to marry an unknown lady.’

‘I think you are merely telling me this to flatter me: a sensible man like yourself!’

‘The sensible man, whom you speak of so lightly, owing to his position as a younger son of good family, has always been extremely poor. But an all-powerful personage, a great Minister, and a life-long friend of my father, became greatly interested in me. He took no less interest in the wife of one of his chief agents, whom he had assisted to accumulate a vast fortune. This gentleman is dead and his widow is his sole heiress; she is still young

and beautiful and, so they say, desirous of attaining a position in the world, to which she had always aspired in vain. Thus our position showed, on the one side, a fortune without a name, on the other a name without a fortune. The Minister wished to provide each party with what was lacking, and on the strength of an intimation of consent, which neither she nor I was in a position to refuse, he plighted our mutual troth by means of a signed undertaking from both of us.'

'So that,' said Frau von Blumm, 'is why your carriage crashed into mine with such extreme violence. Truly I cannot forgive you.'

'You will at least agree, my dear Countess, that there was equal violence on both sides. *Ah! if only . . .*' At these words he blushed.

'If only I had not met you . . . is not that what you mean, sir?'

'I leave you to explain it,' he answered, colouring even more deeply.

'You sigh, I suppose, because by now you would have been at the feet of your beloved?'

'I cannot say that is the precise reason.'

'And yet, had she nothing but her fortune—that is a beauty that turns many heads.'

'Her fortune could have tempted me a few months ago; but an aged relation whom I merely knew by name, and who died at a moment when

I least expected it, has left me a magnificent inheritance which, in this matter, has placed me above necessity, and indeed above any inclination of the kind; so that all my urgency was merely directed to keeping my word.'

'No matter, it is always folly to marry a person one does not know. I am quoting, sir, from your last sermon.'

'Alas! I must have preached with much earnestness, for it was in the interests of your happiness.'

'And, will you believe me, I should be tempted to take the same liberty; for,' she added with a friendly look, 'surely I must repay your kind concern for me.'

'Speak, my dear lady, I am listening with all my heart.'

'Very well then, my dear lord. I am not acquainted with your Minister, nor your lady, nor her first husband, and above all, I am hardly well enough acquainted with the second; but I feel that between travellers like ourselves—extremely impatient to part company as I suppose we are, my lord?'

'Speak for yourself, madam.'

'One is tempted to say:

*"Who has but one more moment in his life
Has no more to conceal."*

So I shall use your weapons and prove to you that

I know your destined wife even better than you do.'

'Proceed, madam.'

'I find your lady, and her so openly avowed patron, somewhat suspect: we are not unaware of the price which such noble protectors attach to such services.'

'Madam, are you not judging somewhat lightly?'

'And you, sir, are you not marrying a little lightly? Here is a beautiful creature—I think you told me she was beautiful?'

'I only know what I was told.'

'Well, let us assume for a moment that she is beautiful: 'tis a quality—is it not?—that does not last. An all-powerful Minister, with a considerable reputation for gallantry, marries this beautiful lady to one of his agents. This gentleman, honoured—and what an honour!—by the acknowledged favour of his master, is put in the way of amassing a vast fortune. He dies and leaves his gains, whether they were gotten well or ill, to his virtuous widow. The Minister does not lose sight of her—for I can fancy that crape and muslin endow her with fresh charms.'

'Do you know that you can be as cruel as you are kind?'

'Let me finish. Your excellent Minister reflects,

in his wisdom, upon the means of consoling a deserving widow, and finds that the best of all of them is a husband of noble birth, who bestows upon his chaste friend a position which will enable her to live, no longer merely upon intimate terms with her beloved protector, but actually in his society. Now, sir, I would have you look into your deepest thoughts as into a magic mirror which would reveal in symbols the course of your destiny, and enjoy in advance the honours that are in store for you.'

'Perhaps the world in general does not view the matter in quite the same light as my charming companion.'

'Take my advice and think the matter over; and be thankful to my postilion for having delayed so monstrous a folly for a few days at least.'

'I wish he could have delayed it for a few years.'

All this conversation took place in the carriage while they were making the most delightful excursion through a magnificent park adjoining the Castle grounds. The beauties around them were the beauties of Nature, but of Nature at her best and in her fullest power, even over the souls of men, that unclothe like flowers beneath her spell. Both our friends felt no hesitation in giving way to her influence. Kindly Nature makes so discreet, so

benevolent, so encouraging a third. Their observations were more candid and their silences more full of meaning, and an invisible witness could easily have read within their hearts more than they could see for themselves. Both of them were thus absorbed in the sweet and secret thoughts that come from fresh open air, fine weather, an agreeable warmth and the perfumed breath of vegetation; and they were beginning to be completely absorbed in their own reflections, when the clatter of the carriage on the paved courtyard awoke them both from their reverie. The Burgomaster's daughter was waiting for them in the hall; she invited them to look at the apartments, which indeed deserved particular attention. The young lady said timidly that she was very sorry that her mother was ill and that there was only her poor self to receive the Count and Countess . . . (At these words, which had so often been conjoined, both of them smiled.) She added that she had had a small collation made ready and would be glad to do the honours of it, and to escort them to the dining-room. She took the Count by one hand while she gave the other to the Countess. The Count could not restrain an ejaculation of pain: the girl had, without knowing it, pressed, though quite lightly, a burn which the Count had received in extinguishing the Burgomaster. She noticed it,

and thought of the peril in which her father had been, and the kind person who had come to his assistance. The poor girl was in despair, fell upon her knees and shed tears upon the wound.

‘My sweet good child,’ said the Count, taking her in his arms, ‘that is the most sovereign balm that could be poured upon my hurts. But stay here with the Countess, and tell me where I may find your worthy mother. I should like to visit her for a few moments to congratulate her on possessing so good a husband and so good a daughter.’

In a few minutes he came back, and as soon as he found himself alone with the Countess, ‘I am conscious,’ said he, ‘of something, I know not what, something gloomy and mysterious inside that building whose influence I feel, though I am a stranger here. Our worthy friend departed the day after our arrival, as he had told me, on an important matter of business which had given him some concern. He was sent for by some youthful personage who does not want her identity known and who appears to have designs on the property. These good people do not like the idea of a change of masters. Their present lord, who has been among them so long, is the very pattern of goodness and honourable dealing; but so far as can be ascertained, he is dangerously ill, of what malady is not stated, and the good man wants to dispose of his

fine estate because he is said to be afraid of dying before he has got his affairs in order.'

'Poor people!' said the Countess.

'I quite realize,' said the Count, 'that this is none of our business, but I cannot help thinking of that excellent father, and that kind invalid mother, and that charming young creature.'

'Ah, above all, the charming young creature: those are indeed the qualities that truly claim the charity of men of the world.'

'Is it for you to speak of such claims?' answered the Count. 'Look at my hands.'

'I beg your pardon, Count, a thousand times. I am tempted to follow the example of our little friend. Are you still in pain?'

'No, since I am looking at you.'

'Count, I see a fine set of backgammon; do you play?'

'I will play with you.'

'And how do you like to play?'

'As you do.'

'Do you like playing high?'

'I am afraid to.'

'Then you are not very skilful.'

'If that were so I should be even more afraid. At high stakes the weaker player does not know that he is giving up the key of his coffer; but the stronger player imagines that he still has it.'

‘Very well, after what you say we will neither of us take any risks, for you don’t seem particularly envious of my money.’

‘That is certainly a suspicion that you may dismiss.’

‘Then we will play for a forfeit that shall be chosen by the winner. I will begin.’

They play, and the Countess wins easily.

‘Your ladyship deserves your victory; but at least I am allowed to admit my defeat, and that is something. I have now but to ask for your orders.’

‘Would it be very indiscreet of me to sentence you to write to me after my departure?’

‘Why, I feel as if I had won!’

‘Now for the revenge.’

This time the throws are low, and the Count finally goes out on a doublet of aces.

‘Come,’ said the lady, ‘I expect my conqueror . . .’ (She pronounced the word ‘conqueror’ with some slight embarrassment; and, what is worse, she observed that the Count marked it, for such matters are quickly noticed when two people never take their eyes off each other.) ‘I hope, at any rate,’ she said quickly, ‘that the conqueror will be generous.’

‘More generous than he could wish,’ said the Count.

'Remember,' she went on, 'that he who abuses his victory is in danger of losing all its fruits.'

'That may be, but it is still worse not to take advantage of it at all. Should I be exacting too heavy a ransom if I asked, in all humility, for that lovely lock of fair hair that I see against your dress.'

'A lock of hair! But that is a great deal to ask!'

'I know it; but the laws of war . . . Come, dear Countess, do not say no; let me rescue this at least from the hands of the Unknown.'

'Fool that I am; I was going to give it you, even though there are so many and such lovely curls awaiting you in Paris.'

'But they have no magic in them.'

'And what magic lies in mine?'

'Madam, I find it hard to tell you: a lock of hair is a bond . . .'

'A marvellous weak one! What is held by a lock of hair alone?'

'A lock of hair is as strong as one likes to make it. You, who are so well acquainted with your Latin authors, ought to remember the fatal lock of Nisus. I am sure it will be the same with this one: the thread of my life will be attached to it.'

'Really,' said the Countess, 'I should think myself very silly if I made so much of a lock of hair; and since this one is no longer attached to me, I attach but little importance to it.'

‘And I,’ said the Count, taking it and putting it carefully away in his pocket-book, ‘I will keep it so faithfully that it will never leave me.’

‘One more game before we go, and one more forfeit, but,’ she added maliciously, ‘so that we may avoid risking more than one of us may wish to lose, the forfeit shall be fixed by the loser.’

The game was decided, much like the others, in four or five throws, the Countess winning by her opponent’s bad play.

Just as they were about to discuss the forfeit, Martine ran up, quite out of breath.

‘Sir,’ said she, ‘Monsieur La Cour has just arrived at full gallop.’

‘And who is Monsieur La Cour?’ said the Countess.

‘My servant, madam.’

‘Yes, indeed,’ went on Martine, ‘and one may well say about him—“like master like servant”; for after you, he’s the finest lad and the handsomest man I have ever seen.’

‘Come now, my dear Martine,’ said the Countess, ‘you really are a sad little fool.’

‘Oh, but it’s perfectly true, madam! he has quite the look of his master. Why, if I could look like madam I shouldn’t worry about my marriage.’

‘Really, I am always terrified of what this absurd little creature will say next.’

‘He wanted to come in, and made such a to-do, as you can’t think; but I wanted to talk to him a little, and I told him, as was indeed true, that madam was talking to his lordship, and that he must be careful not to disturb them.’

‘More folly!’

‘He looked at the carriages and shrugged his shoulders with annoyance; but when he understood that madam’s carriage had only been mended with pieces from yours, he said, “Good lord! what has my poor master done with his wits?”’

‘Come, come, miss, leave us, and go and find your Monsieur La Cour, and we, my dear Count, will, if you please, get back into the carriage. But no; let us stay a few moments: we are leaving the place too soon. Oh, if one could only live here with a husband whom one loved, how easily could one forget the rest of the world.’

‘There is indeed a great poet who also speaks of a pleasant retreat where it would be so delightful to forget the world and be forgotten by it; but you will never know more than half of that delight.’

‘Explain yourself.’

‘How can you suppose that anyone could forget you?’

They returned to the Burgomaster’s house. The Count spoke to his servant, and the Countess on

her part scolded her little featherhead and observed, at the same time, through the window, Monsieur La Cour handing a packet to his master, which the latter read with the utmost attention.

'Now, miss,' said she, 'find me the hat that you know is my favourite.'

'I understand, madam: the white one with the sky-blue feather that suits you so well. Indeed, I'm sure that the Count will be quite overcome by it.'

'I see you cannot stop your nonsense. Be quiet, and get out the dress embroidered with little flowers.'

'You mean the one with forget-me-nots, madam?'

'Exactly.'

'But, madam, you don't remember: that one is at the bottom of a big trunk. I should have to upset everything to get at it.'

'Find some one to help you.'

'I'm not afraid of the trouble—but you are in such a hurry to get away.'

'Who told you so?'

'Lord, madam, I can see for myself! When one is going to get married one does not amuse oneself on the way.'

'That will do; do as I tell you.'

'The truth is I don't very well know how to get

up on to the carriage to undo the chains and untie the cords; if only one of your servants was not behind and the others on ahead! But here we are, travelling all alone by our two selves. Not that I mind, because I'm so fond of you: I wouldn't have anyone near you except me and the Count . . . I know what I'll do: I'll go and ask that handsome Monsieur La Cour to help me, and I'll tell him that you're doing it all to please his master.'

'You will do nothing of the kind, miss, do you understand me?'

'Well, after all, it's hardly worth the trouble. Monsieur La Cour will do something for me for my own sake. I caught rather a wicked look in his eye.'

'Did you indeed?'

'When I say wicked, I mean kind as well.'

'I'm glad to hear it.'

In the meantime, the Count, who was still busy with the repairs to the carriage, and had spared no care or pains, no trouble or expense, at last came to inform the Countess that the work was done, that the missing spring had been replaced, that even windows had been found that fitted perfectly, and that the carriage was, in fact, in quite as good a condition to make the journey as it was when it left Paris.

'In truth, sir,' said the Countess, 'I do not know

how to thank you enough, or adequately to recognize your flattering anxiety to get rid of me.'

'Get rid of you!' he answered, in accents of pain and astonishment; 'rather say, get rid of myself—me, whom your acquaintance has made forget everything except your orders, who have thought of nothing day and night, but how to see you again and see you often—to go and find you, if necessary, at the end of the world; who would give all the years of my life for the privilege of passing one of them in your company . . .'

The Countess, who was deeply touched, continued upon a tone of annoyance, in order not to betray her emotion.

'“Pass my life with you,” indeed! Ah! that is a phrase that men use to flatter any woman; but to help and hasten the departure of a friend . . .!'

'A friend!'

'At least I thought so; and then to say all those pretty things to her—why, it is like digging her grave for the pleasure of throwing flowers into it.'

'You are unfair, though I am grateful for your unfairness. But you must at least admit that you made me promise to use every means I could to assist you to leave before me.'

'That is possible, sir, but, as things stand, I am going to promise not to leave before you.'

'Ah, this is fine,' said Martine; 'here are madam

and his lordship as polite as if they were bowing each other out of a front door.'

'Leave us, miss,' said the Countess; 'we can get on quite well without your comments. No, sir, I repeat it, I will not leave before you do.'

'Nor I before you, madam.'

'Very well, we shall see which of us will keep his word the best.'

'Do you give your word, madam?'

'Indeed I do, sir.'

'And I accept it,' said the Count. 'I must now tell you that I have just received a letter from my father, who asks me, or rather orders me, wherever I may be, not to continue my journey, but to wait for him.'

'Is your father coming? I am indeed delighted to hear it. Mine died before I married, and I have never known what it was to love a father.'

'And mine never had a daughter; but when he has seen you he will realize how delightful it would be to have one like you. He will make your acquaintance, he will like you, and he will talk to you about his son.'

'It will be for me to talk to him on that subject,' said the Countess.

She was about to continue, and her moist eyes were already more eloquent than her lips. But, womanlike, she was afraid that the Count might

take advantage of this; and at the moment when her imagination was sinking in a sea of delight, she burst into a loud laugh.

‘Good heavens above us! What are you thinking about?’ said she; ‘and what of that charming creature who must certainly be walking up and down the road where she hopes to see the arrival of him who is to unbar for her the gates of Paradise!’

‘And what,’ said the Count, a little nettled, ‘is happening to that punctilious hero who, contemptuous of all other considerations, loves you only for your possessions, and desires to carry with him to Turkey no other pledge of your affection than your fortune?’

‘Really,’ said the Countess, ‘both these personages may be kept waiting with the greatest propriety; I find myself tolerably well off here; and you, my lord?’

‘Too well off, madam; so this lady and gentleman must both of them be patient, and if they grow weary, they may marry each other. I give them full permission. And you, Countess?’

‘I have been brought up not to express my inclinations.’

It would be useless for me to try to persuade my readers that these charming people were not in love with each other: I should not be believed.

Yes, they were certainly in love with each other, and they had never been so happy: perhaps they would never be happier. It is true that both of them felt, in their inner consciousness, haunted by their plighted word, which sooner or later would have to be made good; both of them, as they allowed their thoughts to stray over the future, were conscious of the gulf that separated them; both of them, subject as they were to the sacred laws of honour, could not but feel some scruples over a delay which, at first inevitable, had now become voluntary. But scruples, even in the most timid hearts, sometimes add zest to pleasure. After all, they had their lives in which to keep their promises; and surely a pleasure of this kind, so unexpected and so delightful, was innocent enough. One day, and yet another day, a week, and yet another week, are such agreeable and such excusable drafts on destiny! They are a drop of malmsey in the glass; but perhaps, alas, the rest will be as bitter as wormwood. Well, however this may be, their intentions were honourable, their hearts were pure, their relations innocent. Each day was like the one before, except that each day was, perhaps, and would be, a little more delightful than the last.

Must love, like all else in life, change upon the pilgrimage of time? Why is it that it cannot keep

for longer its earliest form and grace, when the very hearts in which it has found a lodging are deceived and take it for friendship, like a youth who is still in ignorance of his own nature, and, at a first glance, does not betray his sex? For my part, I do not know if this was still the case with the Count and Countess; but I am struck by a mutual confidence which could not have arisen so soon from mere regard: on each side there was a need of the other, a continually increasing longing for the other's company, and an equal terror at the idea of a speedy separation. Every day they retired to bed later and every morning they got up earlier: a minute lost seemed like a diamond thrown into the sea. When indoors they spent their days reading or playing games or in conversation, in which one of them hoped that his secret would be guessed, and the other that hers would not; out of doors there were always fresh excursions, on foot, on horseback, by carriage or on the river. They became familiar with all the surrounding country within the radius of about a league; but they visited every place again and again and always with fresh interest, because they always saw each other there and were reminded that they had seen each other there before.

If any two acquaintances of mine reached this point and were afraid of going any farther, I

should advise them carefully to avoid as much as possible (though it would probably result in precipitating them), I should, I say, forbid them to take walks together in certain sylvan spots, and especially on a beautiful spring evening, because that is exactly the season, and those are exactly the places, and that is exactly the time that the invisible enemy chooses by preference to lay his most deadly traps. Dangers and snares are on every side. 'You must be afraid,' I should say to these two pretended friends. 'You must be afraid even of those birds who would not sing if they were not in love, and which, under the leaves that hide them, are sirens for your destruction; you must be afraid of those fleeting images of fleeting pleasures, even of those flowers whose perfume so benumbs your senses and entices you to pluck them, give them away or pin them in your bosom. Then those lovely trees that protect you with their shade, those hillocks whose mossy surface is so inviting, and those streams whose murmur seems to say to you, 'Do like us, follow your inclination.' You smell, you taste, you savour that sparkling light air which is to the air of towns like spring to stagnant water. It seems to reach your very soul and banish all the fancies that were besieging you. You are only too glad to surrender yourself to the kindly peace of the countryside, to solitude that loves a

lover, that shuts your eyes to all else but your companion, and delivers you both into each other's arms, where there is nothing to divide your hearts; to Nature herself, who is present in all her power, and there alone achieves her fulfilment, who speaks to you unceasingly and, if you listen carefully, speaks of nothing else but love. What will it be like at the close of day, when everything that might distract you gradually fades away and, as the minutes pass, yields to your undivided contemplation the object that dominates your thoughts. You will find so many undiscovered charms, such soft and thrilling intonations as you have never noticed before; you have never listened with such sweet but perilous intentness to the words which you know so well and which sometimes diffidence and sometimes frankness makes so persuasive. You have never so completely understood that language of the heart that can so well dispense with words, and, indeed, so many mysterious matters which must be felt before they can be known and which no one who knows will ever attempt to express.

But what is the object of all this? The Count and Countess had doubtless nothing to fear from these agreeable perils, since both were bound by an obligation of honour and both were honourable persons. They might secretly curse it and delay its

fulfilment, but they would not think of breaking it. And yet one day, when they were walking together in a lovely leafy avenue which led from the Castle to the farm, and drinking in the freshness of a magnificent evening, the Count, who was more than usually overcome by his feelings, if that were possible, or, at any rate, felt more confidence than usual, began to relate to the Countess the manner in which he proposed to arrange the remainder of his life; for the first look of a true passion involves a whole existence. First, since obligations of honour come before everything, he would fulfil this fatal promise, which was none the less sacred for being ill-advised. So he would marry that charming but detestable young lady. That is a proceeding that would not last more than three or four weeks; but what a long time it seemed in anticipation! After this, he had decided to leave his pretty wife at Versailles, at her own risk and peril (he hoped, in fact, that this arrangement might not be unwelcome). For himself, he had quite determined to travel alone, not for his pleasure, be it known, but for his happiness; not for his health, but for his life! And from these indications the direction of his journeyings might perhaps be guessed. All this, you will say, was not very moral, but in the first place, after all, it was all in the future, and secondly, love cares very

little indeed for morality. Love cares only for itself, and lovers are a pair of egoists in company. Nor was this all. He would buy, at whatever cost, the property that lay nearest to the Countess's future domain. And if she spent the winters in a town, wherever it might be, were it in Mexico or China, he would buy a house there. The Countess was the point on which all the lines of this admirable scheme converged.

'Thus,' he said to her, 'each day will recall to me what I now look upon with such infinite delight, and the torch of . . . of . . . of friendship,' he continued, stammering a little, though he usually spoke so clearly, 'will illumine the whole of my life.'

'Yes, friendship,' the Countess answered, for hitherto she had not interrupted him. 'The torch of friendship sheds so pure a light, such a gentle warmth!'

'You may find it gentle, perhaps, since you never go near it; but I shall never learn your prudence.'

'Do not praise me too far, my dear Count, and believe me, even on that point . . .'

'What, my dear lady?'

'Yes, even on that point, I do not find myself without blame. I was just now reproaching you with some freedom for marrying a woman whom you do not know.'

‘And you were quite right, my dear Countess, but you must agree that I was right too.’

‘Only too certainly, perhaps. But you, my dear Count, must agree all the same that the choice of a friend calls for the same precautions; for a friend is chosen for life, I suppose?’ said she, with a—well, with a friendly look.

‘For life indeed! For a thousand lives, dear friend,’ said the Count, intoxicated with joy. ‘Oh, heaven!’ said he, recovering himself. ‘Forgive me. I was overcome by pride and delight.’

‘No,’ said the Countess; ‘I was but waiting to call you also my friend. But, I say it again, we are very imprudent, and though I repeat this over and over again, it seems useless. I seem hardly to believe what I say, and sometimes I am tempted to accuse myself of being positively pedantic. Truly, you will prove to have been more in the right than you think; and yet, my friend, in one respect we are both of us really in the wrong.’

‘In what way?’

‘Because we do not know each other well enough; because our friendship is not founded on reason; and you know, perhaps better than I do, that feelings into which reason does not enter do not endure.’

‘True,’ said the Count. ‘I owe nothing to reason, but everything to Chance, who is Fate’s

Prime Minister. I am well aware that he does not know what he is doing, but I am so grateful to him that if ever, on any one of my estates, I have a garden like this, or of any kind . . .’

‘Oh, try to have it exactly like this one! you cannot think how I love it.’

‘I will ask the excellent Burgomaster for the plan of it.’

‘But I interrupted you: what was it that you wished to do in this garden?’

‘Build a temple!’

‘A temple? And to whom? To the unknown God?’

‘No, to the God who knows no one: to Chance, who brought us together and to whom I so devoutly pray that he will never separate us.’

‘What,’ said the Countess, ‘to Chance, that so many hold accursed?’

‘Well, I will never abuse my benefactor. I owe him a week’s happiness, and perhaps—perhaps, a life’s unhappiness. No matter, I will raise a temple in his honour, where he shall be duly worshipped, and if, blind and capricious as he is said to be, he turn all his power against me, I defy him even then to do me injuries to equal the favours he has conferred.’

‘Once more, my friend, we must know each other better before we can be such friends as that.’

‘Oh, believe me, my last and only friend, we know each other better than many so-called old friends.’

‘What! my dear Count, have these days seemed like years to you? Surely years of happiness should pass like days?’

‘I like your interruption,’ said he, ‘but I must continue my apology: some twenty visits, each lasting a quarter of an hour, a few meetings at dinner, balls and excursions, are, in Society, enough for people to think they know each other, and they may even call themselves friends on less than that. But here, days spent together by two people who see and speak to none but each other, which one of them may well find wearisome . . .’

‘Do you think so?’

‘But in which the other finds an ever increasing delight . . .’

‘May I believe it?’

‘And for whom, enraptured as he is, the prospect of a separation is like the terror of death.’

‘Of death? Do not let us speak of it, my dear Count, I beg of you: you must control yourself, you see how much I need an example of courage.’

‘And yet, my dear Countess, if this enemy of my happiness . . .’

‘Who is that?’ said she.

‘He who is waiting for you: this Unknown towards whom you are travelling so fast, carrying with you everything I treasure and everything that I regret.’

‘Oh, heaven! My Unknown!’

‘Doubtless he does not feel, whatever he may be like, all the happiness that is in store for him; but supposing he resembled the portrait that I made of him, supposing you find him disagreeable? . . .’

‘I am indeed afraid that I shall not find him very agreeable; but no matter, it is not him so much that I am marrying, but my good kind friend.’

‘But suppose some incident, some chance . . . you know my devotion to chance . . .’

‘Chance again!’

‘Yes, supposing chance upset this fatal design which is to change the remainder of my days into nights . . .’

‘Go on . . .’

‘No, you must answer what I dare not say.’

‘*Ah! if only . . .*,’ said the Countess; ‘for the rest,’ she added, recovering herself not without a certain embarrassment, ‘I can promise nothing; for there is some one waiting for you too, and the trap is probably too well set for you to be able to escape it.’

‘You may at least notice,’ said the Count, ‘that

I am not hurrying into it: your words are engraved upon my heart.'

'I am proud to hear it.'

'You, who are so well fitted to confuse so many minds, have but made mine clearer; but honour commands me.'

'Say rather it forbids you.'

'In any case, my father will soon be here.'

'Your friend is waiting to see him, and then—you yourself have said it—nothing is impossible to Chance; and believe me, my dear lord, your friend invokes the god as heartily as you do.'

'Well then, my dear friend, if . . . *Ah! if only . . .*'

The Count, overwhelmed with delight and quite beside himself, threw himself at the lady's feet, when, at the end of the avenue, they suddenly saw the Burgomaster's pretty daughter coming in their direction; but she was afraid of disturbing them at an inappropriate moment, and disappeared at once, returning soon afterwards when she thought that both of them had recovered their composure. She made a sign to the Count that she had something to tell him, and he went up to her. The Countess watched them from some little distance away, talking to each other with an animation that she did not greatly like, and with gestures which astonished her and which she interpreted as best she could, but hardly to her taste.

The Count came back at the end of two minutes, and found his lady somewhat colder than when he had left her.

'You seem to have some very interesting business here,' said she with a certain tone and expression that my female readers, if I have any, will better understand how to adopt on such an occasion than I can describe it.

'Madam,' said the Count, without appearing to have noticed anything, 'when one is suddenly invested with an important rank, as I have been, and when for the first time one fulfils the august functions of Burgomaster, one's first care should be to make oneself accessible.'

'Yes, to pretty girls!'

'To them as well as others: justice for all! Where would you be if beauty was a disqualification for obtaining justice?'

'But what can that little creature always be having to tell you?'

'Do I not represent her father? Does she not owe me her confidence and friendship? Besides, there is business to be seen to in my new government, even if it is only the workmen's accounts.'

'By the way,' said the Countess, rather reassured, 'there will be a great many bills to pay before we go.'

'There will indeed, madam; but I warn you it

will take me a great deal of time to get matters straight.'

'If I were only sure of being the sole cause of your reluctance to leave . . .'

'Can you doubt that you are the sole object of my attentions?'

'While we are talking,' said the Countess, 'the light is fading; it must be late, and the night air is dangerous, especially among these trees.'

'But you are not alone.'

'That would be all to the good, my dear Count, if I were merely afraid of being bored; but I have some other precautions to take.'

'At least, my dear lady, before you get into your carriage, say once more, as you stand there, those three short words which my lips so love to utter and which come so sweetly from your own.'

'And what are they?' said the Countess with an affected ignorance.

'*Ah! if only . . .*' said the Count.

'Very well,' said she in a slightly stifled tone, which he might well have taken for a sigh. '*Ah! if only . . .*' Then, as if annoyed with herself, she ran to the carriage, and they returned to the town.

She did not speak a word on the journey, and refused to take any supper before she retired. That little phrase, coming from her, seemed to mean so much . . . but the Count himself had uttered it

with so much charm and fire and passion—and in a tone I cannot describe . . . I was going to say with such a thrilling intonation that she could not hear it without repeating it, like an instrument that vibrates of itself at the sound of another.

‘Feeble creature!’ said she to herself in answer to her own thoughts, ‘that instrument was not your voice, but your heart.’ But, in truth, she thought, there was nothing definite, nothing at all of which this man, however dangerous he might be, could take the least advantage. ‘Have I then broken my undertaking to my friend? Did I promise her that no one should become my friend, that I would become the friend of none? In that case I ought to have promised that I should not meet Herr Von Glücksleben, and that I should be insensible to the impression that I seem to have made upon him. But, if I were made of stone, should I be a friend of hers? Would she want a woman of an ungrateful and unfeeling heart to marry her brother? And, in any event, my promise is unbroken, and I have not even thought of evading it . . . *Ah! if only . . .*’

You must observe that up to this final phrase all that went before had been her thoughts alone; but those three words seemed to have some magic property, and to have forced the passage of her lips: she was astonished, even frightened to hear

them. They betrayed the real state of her heart; but at the same time they reminded her of him who had taught her to utter them, the charm and the tone of passion and the accents of love with which he spoke them. Such sweet thoughts bring nothing but agreeable dreams. We will leave them to the Countess's imagination and await her awakening.

At last she awoke, and her first words, echo of her first thought, were 'What is the Count doing?'

'The Count, madam?' answered Martine, quite embarrassed. 'Does not madam know?'

'Know what?'

'Yesterday, as soon as madam had gone to bed . . .'

'Well?'

'A small carriage arrived.'

'And who was in it?'

'The Burgomaster's daughter.'

'And then?'

'And then she came to speak to the Count.'

'The little monster! And then?'

'And then, what am I to say? They both jumped into the carriage, and heigho for a fine journey!'

'Order my horses at once!'

'But, madam, you will give me time to pack your dresses again, that I took out of the trunks!'

'Call for my horses, I tell you!'

‘But, madam, the one I got out yesterday, only yesterday, the one you brought from Paris for the day before the wedding!’

‘Call for my horses! Oh, will you call for my horses!’

‘But I must have time to fold the things up, pack them, and load up the trunks.’

‘I would sooner you left everything; but, for heaven’s sake, call for my horses!’

‘Madam will surely give me some money to tip the people in the house and in the town who have done so much for her!’

‘There is my purse: settle everything; but I must have the horses!’

‘Won’t madam leave anything for the Burgomaster’s pretty daughter?’

‘My malediction!’

‘She seemed so attached to the Count and to madam—especially to the Count.’

‘I forbid you to mention her name; come, the horses at once!’ She kept on calling for them when Martine had already gone off. ‘I must get away from all this and put it all at a distance. I wish I could disappear out of my own sight, if that were possible.’

At last, after a great deal of effort and trouble, and with the particular assistance of Monsieur La Cour, whose help was given to Martine much

against the grain, the luggage was loaded on to the carriage, the horses put in, and they set off. As the journey proceeded, our charming lady's first agitation had given place, not perhaps to complete calmness, but at least to a feeling of melancholy which is scarcely a consolation, but which is to grief what numbness is to pain, and permits a well-bred woman to listen to the voice of her affections and of her reason with an undisturbed but rarely balanced judgment.

'Poor Louisa!' she said to herself, 'after an irreproachable existence, have you lost your self-respect in so few hours? Are you to blame? What! Are gratitude for kindness and the tenderness and affection which a pure heart so naturally feels for another that it believes to be honest, are these misdeeds? No, Louisa, you are still innocent; but you must admit that you are fortunate to be so. You have been deceived, and you are not the first. No, Louisa, no, you may take heart. The deceiver is the criminal. Oh, these men, they are all our enemies!'

While she was thus occupied with her examination of conscience and given up to her reflections, Martine, who had kept her head out of the window all the time, looking (she hardly knew why) in the direction of Monsieur La Cour, suddenly shouted, 'Madam! madam!'

'Come now, miss, you know I hate anyone to talk when I have a headache.'

'But, madam, there's a cloud of dust that I noticed far away behind us, and though we have been going fast, here it is, quite close up.'

'Well, and who is making all the dust?'

'It is a man on horseback galloping, oh, galloping so fast—you should come and look at him.'

'Pull up the window!'

'Madam, it is the Count.'

'Pull down the blind!'

'Madam, he has a letter in his hand, and he's shouting to the postilion to stop.'

'Do as I tell you, miss!'

Good little Martine set about doing what she was told, though much against her will, but there was no longer time. The Count had already put his hand through the window and held out a packet.

'Come back to what you were, dearest of women, and come back to me: read this.'

The Countess did not condescend to reply, and remained buried in the corner of her carriage with a veil obstinately pulled down over her face, if only to hide the tears that she was so ashamed to shed; but, as she happened to catch sight of the address of the packet, on which appeared a much-loved handwriting: 'Ah, my friend,' said she with deep feeling, 'my only friend! she will never forget

me, never betray me, never make me sad.' Then addressing the Count in a hard polite tone, 'A thousand thanks, sir, for the news that you have been so good as to bring me of my future husband; your plans take you in the opposite direction to mine, and I certainly—' here her voice faltered slightly—'have no claim to stop you.'

'This modesty would surely be more fittingly displayed by me to you,' said the Count in great agitation. 'I shall not presume to delay you for longer than is necessary for you to read that letter.'

'But may I venture to ask from whose hands you received it?'

'From the worthy Burgomaster: it reached him eight or ten days ago, enclosed in a packet that was addressed to him.'

'From the Burgomaster! and what has my friend to do with him? I can very easily guess what he had to do with you!'

'I hope that several matters will soon be cleared up.'

'No, sir, some things are so clear that they need no further clearing up.'

'In the meantime, madam, the claims of friendship bid you for a moment forget all else and think only of your absent friend.'

'Excuse me,' said the Countess, opening the packet.

‘If I, madam, had any power in the world I would excuse everything but injustice.’

The Countess read as follows in a low voice:

‘Make haste, my dear Louisa, not indeed to carry out a plan which would have accomplished my happiness for ever, but to come and console one who will be the unhappiest of women until she sees you. I have lost my father: he was infirm and old. I mourned him for a long while, and I shall always mourn him. He was so good, affectionate and kind. Alas, why is it that my brother is so little like him! But I have no longer a brother: he who, while our father was alive, was so profuse in his endearments towards me and in his respect for my mother, your affectionate nurse, suddenly became transformed into an enemy. Immediately the inheritance came into question, he thought of nothing but despoiling us, my mother of her jointure and me of my rights under the succession. Alas! he did not know that he could have done anything he pleased with us by continuing to show us affection, or at least pretending to do so, and that our voluntary sacrifices would have outstripped his pretensions. But to attack us before the Courts! To accuse us of having abused the confidence of a man whom my mother and I

respected and honoured like a god! To dare to assert in an action at law that my mother, during my father's last hours, though she did not leave him for one second—indeed, you know her well enough—had outraged her husband's last sacred moments by abstracting a chest containing vast treasures!

'Good God!' said the Countess. 'Into what abyss was I about to fall.'

'I had ventured to express some such fears on your behalf, madam.'

'And of what consequence can it be to you, sir, whether it was I or another? At any rate, I am saved, and I offer my thanks to Chance.'

'Chance!' said the Count smiling.

'There are matters,' said the Countess, who was displeased by his smile, 'which are not always amusing, and there are moments when amusement is greatly out of place. But allow me to proceed.'

'He obtained an authorization from the Court to open the chest, and found inside—a collection of correspondence of the past twenty-five years. It revealed our good father's uneasiness at the conduct of his first wife's son, which he imparted to his second wife, and her touching

and continual anxiety to excuse a stepson's faults and to rekindle a father's affection for him, which was on the point of extinction. I am sure you will recognize your kind nurse in this, my dear Louisa; but let me tell you the rest. I have an uncle who is a General, my mother's brother, whom you do not know, because he has spent twenty years either in the Turkish campaigns or quartered in the depths of Transylvania, and who, at the conclusion of his honourable career, came back, covered with wounds, to pass the remainder of his life with his family. He lives with us, and since the worthy gentleman has preserved in his old age all the delicacy of feeling and all the firmness of character that is the mark of true courage, you may well imagine that he has not viewed with equanimity so much trickery and cunning, so much avarice and duplicity. He took the matter up with my brother, in all politeness I have no doubt, but with a frankness and authority that befitted his age and rank. My brother, who is brusque and imperious by nature—alas! I had thought that you would mollify him—took his remonstrances in bad part. My uncle's temper was aroused, and he expressed himself in even stronger and more uncompromising terms. In fine, they both of them became heated, and to

the extent that my brother—if I can call him so—spoke of demanding satisfaction. My uncle, whose age, reputation, achievements, the wounds he had received, nay, even his rank, would have permitted him to refuse such a challenge, showed only too clearly that the feeling of honour does not grow dim in the heart of the oldest warrior. He snatched up his sword, in spite of his gout and his wounds, and my brother unhappily made use of all the advantages over his noble adversary which his strength and agility could give him, and left my uncle stretched upon the ground.

‘This painful scene took place only fifty feet away, in our garden, which is familiar to you. My mother and I had seen them first of all from the windows of the drawing-room, which, as you know, look out on to the lawn, walking up and down and talking with an animation that surprised us. We thought we noticed in the gait and gestures of my uncle a certain vehemence that he had not displayed since his return among us. His head was held as high, his expression as imperious and his step as firm as if he had been but thirty years of age. A moment after they both of them went into the little copse, which you saw planted. At the sight of this my mother and I were both of us seized with an apprehension

which we did not dare to express; we went downstairs feeling more dead than alive, and the first person whom we met in the garden was my brother.

“Where is my uncle?” I said to him, in a faltering tone.

“Where is my brother?” said my mother, trembling.

“In there,” he replied with an ominous tone and expression, pointing to the fatal thicket, and disappeared.

‘We entered, and what a sight met our eyes! Oh, fatal gold! Oh, fatal honour! My uncle lying motionless and bathed in his blood. Doctors were summoned: the wound, which they had at first judged to be mortal, yielded after two or three days to their skill and care. He is now, in fact—to-day is the eleventh of the month—out of danger, but he is none the less anxious to put his affairs in order, and he has consequently decided to sell at once a fine freehold property of his in Swabia: his old infirmities and this wound, which must have far-reaching effects, will prevent his ever going there. I shall soon be going to Swabia to see about the sale that he is anxious to negotiate. As soon as I get there I will let you know, and as I shall have traversed half the enormous distance that separates us, if

I can get any farther, or if you can manage the other half, I shall forget this dreadful time, at least for a few moments, and after these disturbing storms, look upon clear days once more. Farewell.'

'Where shall I go now?' said the Countess. 'Shall I go on with my journey at the risk of passing my friend on her way and finding her gone when I get there? Besides, I cannot face the sight of that ruffian who was intended for my hand, indeed I cannot.'

'And to think,' said the Count, 'that you were on the point of marrying that man.'

'There are perhaps some,' said the Countess, 'who, under a gentler exterior, are hardly less dreadful.'

'Well, madam, you can scarcely be intending to take up your abode in the middle of a field!'

'*Ah! if only . . .*,' said she, sighing.

'*Ah! if only . . .*,' said the Count, 'if only your ladyship would finish the sentence: there is one heart, if indeed there could be one worthy of her, that would find such joy in replying to it. Or if she would permit me to interpret her words so that I might obey their intention . . .'

'I will not trouble you to do so, sir: their meaning is so very different from any you may have read into them.'

‘Well, I will try and explain them to myself in accordance with the fresh news that you have imparted to me: “If only I were not always troubled by the presence of a gentleman who inflicts himself upon me . . .”’

‘I did not say that, and I did not mean it.’

“‘Who pesters me and is disagreeable to me, and has attached himself to my person like a caterpillar to a flower . . .”’

‘I marvel,’ said the Countess, with a bitter smile, ‘at your assumption that the subject of my thoughts is myself and you.’

The Count continued: “‘A man who will not leave me, who has sworn to live only for my sake.”’

‘All this would do excellently well for some one who did not know how matters really stood . . .’

She was, I fancy, about to speak of his nocturnal excursion with the little lady, when they were suddenly interrupted by Martine, of course, who seemed to regard this as her principal duty to her mistress. She had been looking out of the window all the time, as she was unable to hear a word of what was being said.

‘Madam, madam!’ she cried, without turning round, ‘here is a lovely carriage just coming up. I cannot see who is inside it. Why, surely it’s the same as that in which the Count carried off the young lady of the house yesterday.’

'Sir,' said the Countess, with a revival of her original resentment, 'you are putting yourself out unduly on my behalf. You ought surely to reflect,' she added, 'that I am ashamed, and you have perhaps good grounds to be as ashamed as I am. So let us part: let us forget one another; pray accept my final farewell. Drive on, postilion!'

Thereupon she pulled up the window, drew down the blinds, lowered her veil, and buried herself once more in the corner of the carriage.

'Madam,' said the inquisitive Martine, who had no part in these caprices and had furtively drawn up a corner of the blind to look at the road. 'Madam, it's not her at all: it's an old gentleman, who is getting out so slowly, and there's his lordship off his horse like a bird. Lord, I like to see how neatly young people do everything. I can't even think what use old people can be!'

'Stop, postilion!' cried the Countess, through the front window.

'Why, there is Monsieur La Cour,' said Martine, 'getting down on the other side and coming to take the bridle of his lordship's horse. Why, whatever is happening? 'Tis very strange. The old gentleman doesn't know which way to get down. I ask you, look at him with the powder all off one side of his great wig, his velvet coat and his great waistcoat laced with gold and silver, rolled

tobacco-coloured stockings and square-toed shoes . . . First he tried to get down face-foremost, and then apparently that wouldn't do. Good lord! How these old gentlemen make me laugh!

'Fie, Martine! It is very wrong to laugh at old age: you are really showing disrespect to your father and your mother.'

'Ah, now he's getting out backwards, and his lordship's holding him up from behind; now the old gentleman has turned round and his lordship's embracing him . . . That's a good one! What a kind gentleman the Count is—surely he's being too polite, he's kissing the old gentleman's hand just as he kissed yours, the last time he said good night to you. Hush! Here they come.'

'Madam, will you allow me the honour of presenting to you the best of fathers?'

'Sir, you are aware of my desire to be presented to him, and the happiness that I anticipated in making his acquaintance.'

'Madam,' said the old Count, 'in the first place I observe how right my son was, and I commend his judgment.'

'In everything, sir?'

'Yes, madam, in everything.'

'You are surely very indulgent? Really, in everything?'

'Everything is summed up in one thing: he loves

you, and more than that he cannot do; and if a passion that only you could inspire, a loyalty that I will answer for, even if all that I see and know were not . . .’

‘Ah, sir, loyalty can but be recognized by the proofs of it, and sometimes, at the first . . . However, we will not discuss that. I do justice, more than justice to your son. I have been more touched than perhaps I should have been by his attentions to myself, and the manner in which he spoke to me about you, sir, has, if that were possible, increased the warmth of my feelings towards him. Nay more, I admit that I aspired to the happiness of joining him in paying my duty to such a father, as he loves to describe you, and to deserve from you in time the name of daughter . . .’

‘Ah, madam, I feel already with what heartfelt gladness I should soon call you so. But what further obstacle can there be to the happiness of the son and of the father?’

‘Sir, you know better than I that an act like this, which is to govern the rest of one’s life, calls for much reflection.’

‘It is not for me, at my age, madam, to contend against a forethought that is so greatly in advance of your own age. I content myself with pleading the cause of a son, the happiness or misery of whose destiny lies in your hands.’

'Yet he spoke to me of certain engagements . . .'

'They are at an end, madam: a scheming old woman, such as are commonly found in the neighbourhood of influential personages, had succeeded in involving my son, or, I would rather say, entangling him, into a situation from which my honour compelled me to extricate him; and I had come to bring him the news that I had done so. If he had reached his destination four days ago, the matter would have been irretrievable; and on this score alone he ought to give thanks to heaven for the cause of his delay.'

'If I could flatter myself that I had had a hand in the event, I should indeed congratulate myself.'

'What then, madam?'

'Why, sir, I can but repeat my observation that every ill-considered design brings its own penalty. One cannot become well enough acquainted in so short a time, and sometimes,' she added, sighing, 'one becomes too well acquainted. You may add to this, sir, that I have, only lately I admit, discovered a defect in myself . . .'

'A defect! You, madam?'

'Yes, sir, among many others, of course, but one which might destroy your son's happiness as well as my own.'

'I am waiting to hear what it is, madam.'

'It is an undue sensitiveness, an ill-defined

uneasiness, a distrust, whether well- or ill-founded, of what I love the most, an inclination to suspicion which in the long run makes a woman unendurable to her husband and herself.'

'I find these charges highly suspect, madam,' said the old Count, 'and I see in them only the indication of two qualities which give me no apprehension for him who has the good fortune to contend with them. I mean a rich endowment of affection and of modesty. Do not let that stand in our way.'

'No, sir, if I must speak frankly, I will not marry your son, and that is equally an assurance that I will never marry again. I have made up my mind: I am waiting for a friend, the friend, in fact, whose letter the Count delivered to me, though I cannot tell how it had fallen into his hands. We saw the light on the same day: we were nourished at the same breast, and we grew up together. Until we were eighteen we had no friends but each other. Destiny then banished us to opposite extremities of Germany, but we were both equally cast down at the separation, and we both cherished the prospect of uniting, sooner or later, for the rest of our lives. At the present moment she is in great distress of mind; and so, perhaps, am I. We shall forget it in each other's company, for friendship is balm for the wounded heart.'

‘Madam, my concern for my son, and the affecting charm of your conversation, had almost made me forget to deliver a letter which was entrusted to me for you this morning. It might well be from the same person that you are awaiting, and who is to be so fortunate as to enjoy your company. Here it is: open it at once, and pardon the delay.’

‘Well, my dear Louisa, here I am, not far from you. Fix a rendezvous where you will, at the first place that occurs to you. Anywhere will do for friends like ourselves, and the place where we meet becomes a paradise.

‘My uncle is well on the way to recovery, and my mother is nursing him: our affairs are settled. It is true that we have made sacrifices to that end, but we have enough left to make us happier than he who has enriched himself at our expense.’

‘Sir,’ said the Countess, ‘are we far from the next stage?’

‘You can see it from here, madam.’

‘Would you have the kindness to accompany me so far, so that I can write a reply to my friend and give it into your charge.’

‘I warn you in advance, madam, that there is

nothing there but the merest barn, and you will not find any lodging . . .’

‘I shall not stop there.’

‘While at the next stage you would be able to await your fortunate friend, and my son and I could spend at least a few more moments . . .’

‘A thousand thanks, sir,’ said she. ‘I have made up my mind, once and for all. You can see that I have done so, and no doubt you know why. Time may perhaps heal my distress: but there are certain recollections that time cannot efface, and the one you leave with me, sir, is one of those.’

They arrived at the posting-house, and the Countess hastily wrote a note. The old Count took it; the horses were put in more quickly than were expected; the carriage was ready, and Martine in her place. The lady, as she was on the point of getting into the carriage, turned once more.

‘Farewell, gentlemen,’ she said . . . ‘But how is this? Is your son already gone? Have I deserved such conduct on his part? Unhappy that I am, I am spared nothing.’

‘Madam, doubtless the pain of a separation, perhaps for ever . . .’

‘For ever! O heaven! No matter, sir: accept my farewells for yourself and for him.’

The Count made as though to kiss her hand respectfully.

‘No, you must allow me,’ she said, embracing him, with tears in her eyes. ‘You must allow me for an instant the privilege of a daughter to the father who would have been so near to my heart. Forward, postilion!’

And the carriage moved off.

I have not the heart to describe the sensations of our charming heroine upon the occasion of so painful a separation. ‘And yet,’ she said to herself, ‘it was my own wish: it was that senseless Jealousy, fatal child of Hate and Love, that led me astray. I was about to be happy: now I have lost everything, and my heart is torn to pieces—and not my own heart alone. His father, worthy sire of such a son, is stricken with sorrow, and by me. Oh, I deserved what I feared! And what did I fear? Could a man of his sort love a child who had no mind to understand him and whose heart could not respond to his? Was he likely to violate the ties of hospitality? Would he, the very pattern of honour as he is, ravish an innocent creature of her honour, when his rank forbids him to restore it? Would he betray me, insult me, he, whom I can still see before me, whose protestations of the tenderest and most respectful passion I can still hear? Not so: if he had been capable of such conduct, his misdeeds would have taken other forms and, above all, have been more carefully

disguised. The very openness which suggested the accusation exonerates him. I alone am to blame. Ungrateful wretch that I am! And perhaps I wish I may not be the only one to pay the penalty. However, I shall see my friend: he knows her—I wonder how? No matter, she will be able to talk to him and convey him my regrets. Foolish hope! He is already far away—he went off disgusted. My happiness is gone—I have lost it for ever—there is no way out. At least my friend is left to me: and yet what kind of friend can I be now? In all my bitterness and sorrow and remorse, is there a place in my soul for friendship?’

These were the silent lamentations of our wounded Louisa. She took no notice of what was going on around her: she was completely absorbed in her despair, and she defied, if I may so put it, heaven and earth to come to her assistance. It was not so with Martine. The good child had long ago noticed that the carriage had left the post road, and that their direction was constantly changing. They went down by-roads or through avenues, over heaths or across fields. She told her mistress more than once what was happening, but she was bidden to hold her tongue, because an interruption is even more unwelcome, if that be possible, in sorrow than in joy. But the poor girl, who was not quite so indifferent to her

surroundings as her dejected mistress, took upon herself to speak to the postilion.

‘Where are we?’

‘Here,’ replied the postilion roughly.

‘Are we far off?’

‘You’ll soon see.’

‘But this isn’t the way!’

‘I know where I’m going.’

‘You are a very rude fellow,’ and she made a face at him. ‘Madam, madam! the fellow frightens me with his dirty torn cloak pulled over his head, his ugly face all covered with dirt, and his nasty coarse hair falling over his nose like a bear’s. He looks like a were-wolf come to carry us off to a witch’s sabbath. Oh my! I’m frightened! And it’s getting late, you can hardly see your hand in front of you, and there he is still turning from one road into another. He might be as drunk as the other one was. Now he’s ringing his bell: we must be somewhere near houses. Well now! No one would say that a ruffian like that could ring his bell so nicely. Now he’s got down—I suppose to see if he can open that door I fancy I can see in front of us. Yes, knock and hammer away. Oh, here’s some one coming: and now he’s mounting again. At last, here we are, somewhere. What a dismal journey! Perhaps the night will be more cheerful. Come, my kind mistress,’ kissing her hands, ‘wipe

your eyes; don't let people see them all red. What's the use of being so beautiful, if it doesn't prevent you being sad. Why, if anyone else had your face she would be happy enough. But, lord, don't they wish they had!

The carriage stopped in a large courtyard at the foot of a dark staircase. A woman came up with a candle in her hand, opened the door of the carriage and gave her hand to the Countess.

'Where are you taking me, good woman?' said she.

'To your room, madam: for what time would madam wish to order her supper?'

'Ah, my dear creature,' she answered sighing, 'I could not possibly eat.'

'Poor Louisa!' said the woman.

At these words, which were uttered in a voice and with an accent that startled the Countess, she raised her veil, and after an intent look:

'Ah, my Gustel!' she cried, 'my beloved, my only friend, you whom I have so regretted and so longed for during these eight long years!'

'Both long and sad, my Louisa; but let us forget them like a dream that has lasted for eight years, and begin our lives again.'

'Ah! what are you asking, dear sister! And what a wretched companion have you found!'

'There is a cure for everything: we must never despair, since we are once more together; but follow me.'

At this moment a door opened, a man came forward and offered his arm to the Countess. It was the old Count, to whom she thought she had said goodbye for ever. Nothing could restrain her: she rushed towards him, and flinging herself into his arms:

'Ah, my father,' and then recovering herself. 'Sir, I ask your pardon.'

'My pardon, my dear daughter! I would not pardon you had you called me otherwise.'

'Ah, my father! and you, my friend. I recognize your hand in the happiness to which you have brought me back. But I am all astray, I cannot think: you must both have pity on a poor foolish creature whose thoughts bring her both torture and delight. But answer me: where am I?'

'At your Excellency's home, your ladyship,' said a large gentleman whom she had not previously observed in the far end of the room, and whom she recognized as the Burgomaster.

'What do you mean—at home?'

'Yes, at home, my daughter.'

'Yes, at home, dear Louisa.'

'Yes, at your Excellency's home,' said the Burgomaster; 'and here is the proof of it in a

contract in perfect order, and a note from the hand of His Excellency the Count.'

She read:

'The most amiable of women, and the most skilful of players, may perhaps have forgotten a last game of backgammon in which we played for a forfeit, which she was pleased to leave to the choice of the loser. I lost, and I fulfil a very agreeable obligation in offering to her ladyship a place which seemed to please her for a moment and which can never be far from my thoughts.'

'I can't understand a word of it: do you wish to complete the confusion of my poor wits? It must be a jest; but I am much too happy and also much too sad to be amused by it.'

No, your Excellency, there is no jest here that could possibly offend you. The formalities are complete: the estate is yours, and it has been paid for with unimpeachable securities which the Count duly placed in my hands in virtue of his position as your agent.'

'But I gave him no funds for such a purpose!'

'Then, doubtless, his lordship was making an advance on your behalf. It is for your Excellency to consider how you will settle with him. He does not appear to be in a hurry . . .'

'Who can say?' said Fräulein Gustel, laughing.

'And what has become of these securities, Burgomaster?'

'Madam, I conveyed them at once, by the hand of my daughter, to General Rheeborn in Silesia; she took advantage of the carriage that had brought Madam Gustel, and was returning.'

'But what is all this? Do I understand that your daughter undertook this commission?'

'Yes, madam.'

'And what was your part in all this, my friend?'

'A very important one: it was I who sold the property.'

'And that pretty little creature has departed?'

'Yes, in the carriage I am sending back to my mother.'

'Ah, how fond I am of her!' she said aloud, but in an undertone, 'How I hate myself! But what is this place called?'

'My dear Louisa, you must try to collect yourself. Don't you see that you are at Flüßsenhausen?'

'You must all forgive me: I am so shaken and agitated. I have so much to think of that I forget everything. Still,' she went on, 'I am not yet so far deprived of reason and recollection to consent to an act of folly that would degrade me in my own eyes. No, sir . . .'

'Madam, I no longer answer to that name.'

'Very well then . . . Father! ('But, in heaven's name,' she added to herself, 'wherever can his son be . . .?') Father, then, since you encourage me to call you so, I hope you will not believe me capable of such conduct, and that you will use your authority in this matter to bring your son back to reason.'

'Madam, I have countersigned the act of transfer, and I am not accustomed to go back upon what I have done. My son was master of his actions, and it is for you to negotiate with him; but between ourselves, I hope that friendship may command you to retain what honour forbids him to take back.'

'And where is he?' said the Countess, forgetting her surroundings. 'Where is he? It is useless to comfort me with hopes that do but redouble my grief. He was not even there to receive my farewell: he has gone, gone for ever . . .'

Martine came in.

'Madam, that was a very strange postilion. He said to me in his thick voice, "Take away your money and yourself with it." "Well, and what do you want, you dirty old bear?" said I. "Do you want me to tell my mistress?" "Tell her that I want . . . that I want to take service with her." "Oh, decidedly," said I. "She'll get a fine servant. But wait until she gets a menagerie and we will

give you a cage in it." Upon which, he took me by the shoulders, turned me round, and here I am. But, hush! I can hear him playing a little tune the other side of the house.'

'Why, I've never heard anything like that in all Bohemia,' said the good Fräulein Gustel, 'where they play the horn so well. An air from Mozart! Do you hear, Louisa?'

'Yes, but what do I care about airs from Mozart?'

'Listen! you can almost hear the words:

"Oh, pray let your heart grow softer."

'May he come in, my dear daughter?' said the old Count. He went out forthwith, and as soon as the melody was over, he returned, and with him was indeed the same postilion who had made the journey, but who, relieved of his false moustaches, his threadbare coat, and fur cap, appeared before the Countess simply as the man who had driven her so far and so fast.

'My father, my father!' they both cried together, 'give us your blessing.'

THE DERVISH: A TALE OF THE EAST

FOREWORD

IN this little work, which certain friends, no doubt in an excess of indulgence, have expressed the wish to see in print, I cannot altogether congratulate myself on the merit of veracity or of invention; but if goodwill can perhaps be regarded as a merit, then let me lay claim to that. The incident which it is my business to relate did take place: I heard it from the lips of an agreeable person who is much better worth listening to than my tale is worth reading. Unlike me, she was under no necessity of changing places and names to lend interest and charm to her tale. The truth was enough: if I had been able to retain her words, to reproduce her accents, I should not be uneasy; but charm, which can so deeply touch the feelings, leaves but few traces in the memory. Grace and sweetness depend on so little! And that little, important as it is, is so transitory, so evanescent, that when one tries to recall it, one remembers only the impression that it made without being able to communicate it. Besides, some matters of this sort are the exclusive property of women, and if I had tried to relate the incident as it was told to me, I should soon have realized how the language of one sex is untranslatable into that of the other. I have thus been forced to have recourse to other

methods: I have changed the scene, and I have invented circumstances which seemed likely to increase the interest of the rest of the story.

The opportunity has been offered me of giving some incidental description of the manners, opinions, and conversation of a company of soldiers who had served for a long time together under the same flag, among whom honour, enthusiasm, common interests and even danger have given rise to more goodwill than is found in the members of any other profession. I have tried to describe what I have seen, and what is better seen in camps than elsewhere: a fine confidence, a frank courtesy, a touching humanity which are nearly always found allied with true gallantry, and purify and adorn it with all the marks of generosity, and thus transform it from a quality into a virtue. And I have taken pleasure in portraying men of the highest character (as the Sultan Akbar is presented to us in the Indian Tale) as the truest friends of all merit, the most averse from persecution, the most easily touched by gratitude, and the most ardent in the pursuit of universal well-being.

But all this is by the way: my real object in writing was to arouse in every heart two emotions, of which one is in some sort the corollary of the other—filial piety and paternal love. These feelings

may be regarded as the two corner-stones, the two central links in the great chain which binds all living beings together. What, indeed, would become of the world if the continuation of the human race was solely concerned with the reproduction of individual members of the species, and if the Spirit of Harmony, the *gentle Kamadeva* (as the Hindus call it) did not hover over our planet? What would become of us all if there were no reasonable beings, enjoined by Nature herself to love those weaker creatures who are not yet capable of love, and if those same creatures, so weak in their beginnings, were not compelled, in their years of reason and of strength, to cultivate love and gratitude towards those who loved them so early and without response? I must correct myself for saying that Nature compels us to this: she only engages us, and the proof is that she sometimes meets with a refusal. For this reason every writer, so far as his matter and his means will permit him, should feel it incumbent on him to add any attraction that he can to Nature's exhortation in this regard or, I would rather say, to display it in all its charm. What nobler employment could he find for his art than in assisting Nature, in falling in with her aims, and in some measure increasing the power of her magnetic charm and transforming these innate emotions

into an irresistible code of law? An enterprise for ever admirable which, if it succeeded, would render all laws more sacred, more simple and, at the same time, less necessary. For if this world were filled with good fathers and good sons, what would there be left to wish for? Wisdom would command and love would obey. The good sense of riper years would guide the actions of youth, and the elders would see their youth revive in their young disciples; youth in its turn would never grow weary of honouring these revered domestic divinities to whom was due all the happiness of childhood, and would be equally perturbed at their disappearance from the home as at the extinction of a lamp that was lighting their path.

It has long been believed, especially in France, that poetry, the drama, and romance could not dispense with love. Love has become a universal agent, the all-powerful motive behind all human actions. But use has weakened the resilience of the spring: moreover, if the reader will recall all the emotions which the various works of this kind have aroused in him, he will agree that, with few exceptions, the strongest have been produced by emotions other than that of love. Orestes and Pylades disputing as to which of them shall die for the other; Nisus imploring his enemies to aim at him all the missiles threatening Euryalus; Philoctetes

claiming the rights of humanity and asking to be given back the weapons that mean his sustenance; Priam prostrate at the feet of Achilles to ransom the lifeless remains of his son . . . these scenes have drawn more universal tears than most of the lovers whose raptures and whose sorrows have been described for us by the poets. When the Greeks and the Latins, our masters in the art of arousing emotion, undertook the description of love, they depicted it in all its fury and in all its strength: Phædra, a prey to the vengeance of the Gods, yields to the power of a love that is not to be found in France; or Dido, who is sacrificed defenceless by Venus and Juno, united for once by their opposing interests, to a love from which she dies. But when these Greeks and Romans depict love with such shocking exactitude, observe that it is to dissuade us from it, whereas in our modern literature descriptions of this emotion are intended to attract us. And what happens? What should move us begins to grow tiresome: hearts grow feeble instead of tender; there is no improvement in our manners, our minds are not elevated, nor does our conduct show any increased good sense. The result of it all is that at an age which is still capable of receiving instruction, our young people learn nothing but gallantry, certainly the least essential of all the sciences. Heaven forbid that I should

condemn it! That would be to crush deliberately the most lovely flowers in the meadows of our life, and such austerity would perhaps be more inappropriate in my case than in any other. It is none the less true, however, that every writer who wishes to contribute what he may, as indeed we are all called upon to do, to the perfecting of society, ought to try to scatter a few seeds of virtue that may come up as they can. But for this purpose a writer has no need to introduce the passion of love into his instruction. Love is anything but disinterested, anything but a social emotion: it always demands a recompense and insists on exclusive privileges. But at the bottom of the human mind there is always something fine and generous that pays more regard, and attaches more value, to the description of a feeling wholly purified of all self-interest, such as friendship, loyalty, filial affection, and patriotism—all the more noble impulses, in fact, which raise one man above another and seem to free him from all the ties which bind him to brute nature.

Finally, literature has its duties: and to give pleasure is not one. For true duties are only those which one is always able to fulfil. How fortunate we should be if giving pleasure were among them! It is but our first expedient, a necessary precedent to instructing the reader, for if we do not please,

we cannot persuade. But when persuasion flows from the pen of an author, as it were from the lips of Nestor, it ought to resemble those transparent waters which are nevertheless imbued with healthful qualities for those who will plunge into them. I shall therefore never be tired of insisting that it is the author who has best depicted and especially stimulated the emotions which tend to peace, justice, sympathy and general goodwill, has most truly felt and fulfilled the obligations which talent itself imposes on all men of letters. I shall be the last to claim that I have succeeded: the mind cannot recognize its own achievements, but is well aware of its motives.

It would be worse than useless to bring to the reader's notice or ask his indulgence for the method I have followed or, rather, neglected, in the course of my narrative. I have always supposed that no rules applied to trifles of this kind, but that one had merely to abandon oneself to the movement of one's thoughts and seize upon them as they developed from each other. It is not our business to look for them: they must come to us; the author has quite enough to do in selecting his setting, and the colours which shall express them as nearly as they came before his mind.

It will easily be seen that I am not widely travelled in Asia, although I have chosen it for the

scene of my story; and I have not made any very exhaustive inquiry into the situation of the places that are mentioned in my narrative, nor into their names, their history, their appearance and other matters, which no doubt would be the better for being known. I have written at random, like so many others, conceiving that I was not composing a History, nor a Treatise on Geography, nor a work on Statistics, but simply a Story. I hope that my errors in this regard may not lead to any awkward consequences, and that most of my readers, if I have any, will accept my version of the land of Asia, and will extend to me the notable privilege which Horace himself allows to all those who are engaged in painting or literature:

‘ . . . pictoribus atque poetis
Quidlibet audendi semper fuit æqua potestas.’

THE DERVISH

A Tale of the East

IT happened during the reign of the Sultan Akbar, whose name should always be dear to the memory of men: Akbar the most gallant of warriors, and the most merciful of conquerors. Never did he fear an enemy, or turn away a suppliant: just, humane, generous, tolerant and courteous, all the virtues were rivals for the possession of his great heart, which could hardly contain them, and his sole imperfection was the excess of his good qualities. His courage made him sometimes rash, and his generosity lavish; he would be trusting to the point of imprudence, and sympathetic almost to weakness: fortunate failings, since no man can be without faults, that made Akbar even more lovable than if he had been quite perfect. The great heart of Akbar had but seldom been troubled by tumults, rebellions and intrigues; but, like pure gold whose brilliance is only increased by friction, his virtues only continued to shine the more brilliantly. After twenty years passed in defeating and then pardoning his enemies, the world was at peace, and Akbar was enjoying its tranquillity. His genius, which was the equal of his courage, had doubly confirmed his

conquests by the wisdom and mildness of his laws. Security, daughter of Peace, had already brought back to the entire country fertility and joy, and the lovely land of Asia flowered once more like a fruitful garden after devastating storms. The world was at rest: Akbar himself was at rest, sated with glory, and, in the phrase of the poet, 'tasting the fruits of his labours.' He had chosen the city of Agra, called the Diadem of the World, for the seat of his vast Empire: for thirty years one hundred thousand captives had worked without ceasing on the splendid plans of the great King: he had embellished it with the treasures of the world, with masterpieces of its art and trophies of his victories, and there he proposed to pass such remainder of his days as *Adaristo*, or Destiny, should have in store for him, in protecting and cultivating science and letters, which in one of his poems (for Akbar was a poet too) he calls the Houris of thought, and without which heroes would be at a loss to know what to do with their glory or men with their existence.

At this time, Akbar's edicts needed no longer to be enforced by arms: the world was content to obey, and the will of Akbar was the desire of his peoples. The victorious army, which had been rendered useless by the triumphs of the Emperor, was reduced to half its numbers, and soldiers—

horse and foot—officers, Omrahs, Emirs, all were returning joyfully homewards, upon their discharge, to enjoy the wealth which the King of kings had so generously distributed among them: all were anticipating the delights of repose, of which the warrior draws such charming pictures while on service, but which he so quickly finds tedious when at home.

Among these brave travellers, whose caravans spread all over Hindustan, according to their various destinations, was a company composed of some of the most distinguished Emirs in the army, who were travelling in the direction of the Royal City. They moved in short stages with a numerous suite and a mass of baggage, nearly all of them carrying with them valuable spoils of war, and while on their journey they enjoyed all the conveniences of life as well as the pleasures of good company. All these Emirs had come, for the most part, from far-off countries to take service under the standards of the greatest of kings; nor had any religious differences deterred them: Akbar protected them all. He detested the persecutions which his predecessors had practised for so many centuries, and he only adopted those rules laid down in the Koran which might serve to improve the human race; he regarded the variety of faiths as an accumulation of moral wealth, and he

looked upon them as vessels of different shapes all filled with a celestial beverage. 'Let us be careful,' he would often say, 'not to break them, and let us even prevent them from coming into contact with each other.' Our Emirs, while they learnt the art of war under such a master, had at the same time learnt tolerance; moreover, the same profession, a long fellowship under the same flag, common dangers, services rendered and received and, above all, the habit of companionship, had in some sort shaped them in the same mould, and the army finally adopted, in general, the same opinions as well as the same language. No one asked whether So-and-So was a Mussulman, a fire worshipper, a Hindu, a disciple of Zoroaster or Confucius: the Hindu would eat beef or the Mussulman would eat pork, and so on. Fasts were forgotten, only festivals were observed: water was banished from the table and was used only for ablutions. Liberty of conscience, for those who had one, was guaranteed. For the rest, all recognized a God above all other gods: all obeyed a King above all other kings. Glory was their idol and honour was their law: and their creed was that of all brave men.

It will not, therefore, be found surprising if, at every halt, a large number of cooks, who always journeyed on in front, were continually engaged in

the careful preparation of the most delicate dishes, whether these were allowed or forbidden: if the finest wines of Shiraz, Yerd and even of Europe flowed like the purifying waters of the Ganges, and if a goodly part of the company's time was passed at the table, for after all the privations and burdens of a long war this is the most excellent relaxation of all. No formalities, no reserve, and no secrets: among this courageous band there was complete confidence. They feared their friends no more than their enemies: and whether the repast was prolonged in order to continue the conversation, or the conversation in order to lengthen the repast, this was the moment in which every one chose to inform the company of the plans which he had in mind. It might be a worthy Mingrelian, who described with enthusiasm the chain of rugged rocks which surrounded the narrow but fertile property of his fathers: there, in a charming abode, he had left his young wife and children, of whom he had not thought while wearing his armour because, during that time, as a European poet said, his breast was bound with triple steel, but they had now come back into his mind after eight or ten years of other occupations. What joy, and what delight and what celebrations there would be when he saw them again! The children would be growing up, his wife would certainly

still be beautiful. He had no anxiety about the children, nor even about his wife: generous hearts have no such feelings. His mind was made up: he had given his youth to the service of the Sultan; he would now retire to his home, and the remainder of his life would not be too long to spend in recovering from the exertions of his youth.

‘My dear Abufar,’ said Koramed, ‘at the first rumour of war you will want to take service in order to get a rest from your retirement.’

‘Thanks to the great King,’ said another, ‘I have with me a small camel laden with gold: it is more than I want; I have nothing to do but to enjoy it. There is lovely country round my home, but its beauties are for those who take their walks in it: I have not yet seen so much as an ear of corn in my own lands.’

‘Ah, my friend,’ interrupted a gallant Tartar, ‘the finest harvests are those reaped from the fields of the foe.’

Another talked of exchanging the twenty magnificent prisoners that he was taking with him for five or six beautiful Circassian women, who might prevent him from growing tired of peace, provided it did not last too long; but he was quite determined, at the first rumour of war, to exchange these again for as many of the noblest Arab steeds, which would then be of more use to him.

They discussed in this way everything that came into their minds, all except one among them, who, since they had set out, had taken no part in any conversation. He called himself Mohély: his real name was unknown, but in the army he was distinguished for his strange dress, his courage and his high character, and no one knew who he was; all questions put to him about his family and his country remained unanswered. Even his countenance was in some sort a secret. This was never more than partly visible under the folds of a long muslin veil, which he wound carefully round his head like the women of Kandahar. Had he some natural deformity? Was it as the painful result of some wound that he was compelled to disguise himself in this manner? It was a mystery which it had been found useless to try to penetrate, and was now respected. But the muslin veil, the emblem of modesty, concealed a gallant and a wise man: he had always been a pattern to all, the friend of every man, rival of none, and he would sometimes say that the soldier should preserve his humanity even in the thick of the fight, that he should do no more hurt than was necessary, and that he should console himself for that by doing all the good that he was able. He held merely the position of volunteer with the rank of Emir: he had no command, but always took part in the fight. He would usually

hasten to the assistance of his comrades at the most dangerous junctures, help them with his advice in their dispositions, and in the battle with his good right arm, but he would never claim his share in their triumphs. But in the ordinary business of life he concealed his mind as he concealed his countenance; he usually let the other Emirs speak, and they rarely presumed to rouse him from his contemplation.

However, in the course of this conversation, in which they were all talking of their plans for the future, one of the guests, named Ghulam, whom imperfect sobriety had made a little careless, addressed him.

‘And you, Mohély,’ said he, ‘what are you proposing to do after this?’

‘What every one does in this world,’ said Mohély, ‘strive patiently and wait for what may come.’

‘Take note,’ said Ghulam, ‘that he has spoken.’

‘Indeed,’ said Koramed, ‘you are much more sparing of your words than of your blood. There is not one of us—myself included—that you have not guided like a Jinn, and many owe it to you that they are still alive.’

‘It is also true,’ said another, ‘that large numbers on the opposite side owe it to him that they are not.’

'But all this,' Ghulam continued, 'is carried on in silence. He enters the fight, swings his sword, and kills, all without a word, and when his man is down, he is none the better pleased.'

'There is no reason to boast,' said Mohély.

'As soon as you saw one of us in danger, you rushed to his side: though twenty were upon him, you rescued him and then returned to your position as though nothing had happened. Apart from this, you have never challenged anyone to a fight.'

'The Sultan,' replied the Emir, 'needs one soldier the more rather than one enemy the less, since all his enemies have ended by becoming his subjects.'

'You have spoken the truth,' said Ghulam, 'and spoken it well. But,' continued the genial fellow, 'we must above all remember how our excellent comrade entertains his friends from time to time. I shall never forget a certain pleasure party in the desert, nor a certain glass of water that I found so good.'

'Rarity gives value to everything,' said some one.

'A trifling and temporary infidelity to his system of life,' said another, 'which he has since amply repaired.'

'By Mahomet I must tell the story,' said Ghulam.

'Tell us another one,' said Mohély.

‘No, I want every one to hear an incident which does honour to both of us, since you saved a man’s life and I drank two glasses of water.’

‘Never mind that,’ said Mohély, ‘one would imagine you could think of nothing else.’

‘You must know, then,’ said Ghulam, ‘that the Emir and I, while the army took a few days’ rest under the walls of Damascus, had gone hunting together in the desert, where, after prolonged search after game, we found nothing, and at last lost ourselves; we began to be uneasy: we had eaten our provisions, the heat was stifling, and we were consumed by thirst. In vain we cast our eyes far over this sea of burning sand—sand, and nothing but sand, could we see. We began to feel ourselves at the limit of our strength, and to await our end, when at last we thought we could descry dimly on the horizon an object which was raised slightly above the uniform expanse. We dragged ourselves at a hazard in that direction. It was a dromedary which had fallen dead on the spot and seemed to predict our own destiny. His load was still on his back, and two small barrels which formed part of it had rolled on to the sand on either side of him; we hoped that they might contain something to drink, and we both agreed beforehand to keep the one that chance might assign to us. Alas! I found nothing but gold in mine, and

what is the use of gold in the desert? There had been water in Mohély's cask, but there remained hardly enough to fill twice the coffee-cup that we took with us on these expeditions. Mohély, more overcome by my thirst than by his own ('he is like that with everybody,' said Koramed), called me to him and invited me to fill my cup first; but as I was raising it to my lips I collapsed from weakness. I let the cup fall and the water was wasted. Mohély, instead of drinking his share, threw some of it over my forehead to bring me back to life, and then compelled me to drink the rest. The Prophet no doubt observed the matter, for almost at once a beneficent cloud melted into rain above us, and gave us back in superfluity all the water we had lost.'

The company applauded, and the Emir, who was embarrassed by their praises, reproached Ghulam for telling the story.

'You can be as angry as you like about his story,' said Malvear, 'but you will not prevent me from relating mine. Do you remember the beautiful damsel in Lakhnauti? By the Prophet! I do not think there was a woman in that country to compare with her. She was guarded by a whole regiment: she was respected by all, which was unusual, because it had been decided to present her as an offering to the Sultan, who would have paid a magnificent price for her. But there was a poor

old creature who would not let her go: he said he was her grandfather and wept and howled, not knowing to whom he should address his supplications. He was, not unreasonably, on the point of being killed, when Mohély threw himself between them and the soldiers. He took the old man and his daughter under his protection, carried them into the nearest house, placed a guard over it, and drove away the curious.'

'It was very kind of them to go away,' said Ghulam. 'If I had been there—I swear by my sword and by my lance . . .'

'You might add your glass,' said Koramed. 'Well, and what is your oath? Would you not have obeyed orders and gone with the rest?'

'Perhaps, but death and fury! the girl would have gone with me.'

Here Mohély shrugged his shoulders, and signs of compassion might have been detected in his bearded countenance.

'Surely,' Ghulam continued, pouring out a bumper, 'when the Prophet has been willing to look favourably on a brave man, on a true believer, and bestows on him a beautiful lady as an earnest of the joys of Paradise; and when the possession of her merely involves the killing of an ancient unbeliever, surely it is an act of impiety to let her go?'

‘Every one has a right to his own opinion,’ said the warrior coldly. ‘I have always considered the blood of old men, women and children as stains on my sword.’

‘He is right,’ said all the Emirs with one voice. ‘By Mahomet, by Indra, by all the Prophets and the Jinns, he is right! He speaks little, but he speaks well.’ And the goblets were immediately filled and emptied in honour of this man who was so sparing in his speech. The general company became even more talkative, the gaiety became more noisy, and the exchange of confidences increased in prolixity. Healths were drunk on all sides amid a growing uproar. Five or six stories were being told simultaneously to audiences of noisy disputants: bursts of laughter and clapping of hands—all this disorder (if I may be permitted to use such a word to describe such distinguished company) went on increasing. It was already impossible to hear oneself speak, when a voice was heard across the tent which was above all the others, and immediately silenced them: it was the bray of a donkey. Since none of these distinguished noblemen had a steed of this kind among his war-horses, they all stopped talking, and looked at each other with astonishment. Then, giving way to the spirit of the celebrations, every one asked his neighbour, ‘Was it you? Was it you?’

But suddenly the curtain of the tent was partly drawn aside and revealed a holy personage, a Dervish, whose venerable appearance attracted the attention of the entire company. At this unexpected apparition, the facetious Ghulam made as though he would leave the table and take with him the goblets and bottles, for he was afraid, as he said, that this might be a police spy of the Great Prophet, who would certainly denounce them.

‘Stop, my lords,’ said the holy man. ‘Do not take any more account of him who now greets you than you do of your enemies in battle.’

‘So you will promise not to tell Mahomet,’ Ghulam went on.

‘I might be ill received,’ said the holy man gently, ‘if I accused you before him: for if I have properly understood his story, he had some slight prejudice in favour of brave men; in any case, I was not brought up under his laws, and I should be sorry if your lordships counted it against me; but I should like you, my lords, to believe that if Mahomet makes heroes, Brahma also makes virtuous men.’

‘Brahma,’ said the taciturn warrior, and bowed respectfully, then he raised his head and, looking at the Dervish, ‘Reverend sir,’ he said, ‘your law does not prevent your joining us.’

‘Our law,’ he replied, ‘enjoins upon us fellowship with all men.’

‘In that case you are welcome,’ said Ghulam, ‘provided you have not come here to preach sobriety.’

‘War,’ said the Dervish, ‘must have taken the place of Ramadan for all of you: those times of abstinence have absolved you from fasting for the rest of your days.’

‘Then you will allow us to proceed,’ said Mo-hély, making room for him.

‘I should regard it as a misfortune,’ said the other, ‘if I were interrupting your celebrations. I would that I could join more heartily in your gaiety, but the wounds in my soul permit of few cheerful moments. Still, I will tell you, my lords, that not for many long years have I felt so disposed to gaiety and even happiness. When I saw this pavilion in the far distance, something, I knew not what, aroused in me the desire to visit it. I straightway asked of Brahma the favour that I should be well received; he has granted this, and I offer my thanks to you, noble Emirs, and to him. The moment I drew that curtain aside I felt that I was in some measure drawing aside the clouds that cover my spirit, and I could not understand the delightful sensation that suddenly changed the habit of my mind.’

‘I hope that so excellent a presentiment may not be in vain,’ said Mohély. ‘Come, holy father, forget your sorrows and your weariness. I feel as if I were doing so too: and restore yourself in our company. Slaves,’ he added, ‘see to the holy father’s beast.’

‘Yes,’ said Ghulam, laughing, ‘our horses must learn politeness and invite the stranger to join them at the manger.’

‘Ah, my lords, this is too much honour for the Dervish and his ass. They are neither of them used to all this courtesy.’

‘That should astonish you less than anyone,’ said Koramed, ‘you who believe in transmigration, and think that kindness to an animal is repaid sooner or later in the world of men.’

‘It is true,’ said the Dervish, ‘that the God Vishnu resolved in his wisdom and his goodness to assume in succession the forms of all living creatures so that he might judge for himself how they are suited to the souls which Brahma has destined for them; we believe, therefore, that he concerns himself even with animals and with plants, for in every one of these may be lodged a human soul. All that we do for them, even in secret, is recorded above on the great diamond table: Vishnu reads it and holds us to account for it.’

‘What?’ said a devout Mahommedan, who was

listening. 'Are your Gods taken up with these melancholy amusements instead of thinking chiefly of the heroes who wash out their faults in the blood of their enemies, and spill their own so lavishly for the glory of their country and their king?'

'Nothing escapes the vision of the Gods,' said the Dervish; 'but they leave it to humanity to admire and praise those good actions which carry their glory with them, like the blood-red glow of the ruby. But they keep to themselves the knowledge of secret actions which they only can reward or punish. They see the thoughts which prudence hides; they listen to the sighs which are stifled by fear. This duty is laid upon them by their common Master, by Him who is God of gods as Akbar is King of kings.'

'Brave Dervish,' said Ghulam, holding a flask in his hand, 'you talk like a prophet; reach me your cup, if your invisible friends will let you.'

'The noble Spirits,' said the Brahmin, 'to whom the Gods have entrusted the conduct of affairs here below, love men better than men love each other. They smile at their pleasures as fathers and mothers smile at the games of their little children, and only forbid us to do ourselves harm.' Then reaching out his cup with a merry expression, he let it be filled, and as he raised it to his lips, he said, 'O Vishnu! O Mahomet! O Mithras! O Foë!

and all other high servitors of the Supreme Master invoked by peoples whom I know not, condescend to notice a humble creature who adores Him whom you adore. The more you are above me, the more I should think to offend you in supposing that you could be jealous of the few good moments that our condition allows us in this transitory place. Let me rather find a good omen in this enjoyment, too fugitive, perhaps, but so long unknown to my heart.'

He proceeded to drink, amid the applause of the company, and when he had emptied his goblet, in accordance with the custom at military celebrations, he poured the last drop on to the nail of one of his fingers.

'So you find it good?' said Ghulam.

'My lord, if it was not good you would not give it me,' answered the Dervish, 'and,' he added, with increasing gaiety, 'you would hardly be drinking it yourself with so much pleasure.'

'Do you know where it comes from?'

'From a good vineyard, I am certain.'

'I will wager that you cannot tell me.'

'My lord, it would hardly beseem a poor Dervish to be so great a connoisseur.'

'It comes from the cellars of the Governor of Lakhnauti.'

'Unhappy city!' said the old man, sighing.

‘No matter,’ said Ghulam, ‘that does not prevent the wine from being good. I bought it from the soldiers, to whom the worthy man had presented it.’

‘My lord, may I ask upon what occasion?’ said the Dervish.

‘Why, by Mahomet, it was when they threw him out of the windows of his palace.’

‘My Lord Emir,’ said the Dervish sadly, ‘your Prophet bids you conquer, and in that you obey him, but he certainly does not forbid you to show compassion to the conquered and respect for the dead. And what man of honour and courage would dare to carry on war against such enemies?’

At these words, which were uttered in a tone at once firm and impressive, a significant silence fell upon the company, which might have served as a lesson to one of the speakers and a compliment to the other.

Soon afterwards the conversation turned to other subjects, and most of the observations were addressed to the new arrival. He answered them all with propriety, and even from time to time allowed himself to join in the general gaiety, so far as his age and condition would permit of this. But while he paid due attention to all the company, it was observed that he would always turn to Mohély with an air of preference and confidence that

was very noticeable. The Dervish judged his company by what they said, and it seemed that he found in him that talked the least what he had looked for in all the others. It may easily be imagined that the conversation of this exclusively military society mostly turned on stories of a kind with which they were all well provided: for a long war provides each hero with enough of them to last his lifetime. 'Let your actions be noble,' said a wise Hindu: 'you will never forget them and life will never weary you.' While these stories were being told, the Dervish watched with curiosity the smallest changes of expression which could be observed in these half-veiled features. He noticed that the Emir was indifferent to frivolities, but attentive to matters of moment; he would frown and show open disapproval when he heard of any licentious or savage action, while his countenance would clear again at the narration of every act of courage, generosity, or compassion. The holy man had been especially struck by the interest and satisfaction which the Emir displayed at his account of the invisible beings who keep an exact record of the secret actions of men, of which they have to give a faithful account to the Supreme Justice; and he judged rightly that only the sincerest goodness could thus take pleasure in such pious speculations.

On his part, the taciturn Emir was studying his companion and found in him something mysterious, which at once disturbed and attracted him. The white hair, the flowing beard, the majestic countenance, wrinkled but still handsome, the quiet though subdued expression, the strong but simple intellect, the saintly tolerance and kindly good sense, made more than ever impressive by a certain cast of sadness that was sometimes effaced by the desire to be agreeable company—all aroused in the Emir a feeling which astonished him. It was a feeling of respectful curiosity and reverence not unmingled with pity. A pleasing tribute which in such circumstances the good man loves to render in the time of his strength and to receive when his years are failing. Alas! it is at least a shadow of filial piety which seems to recognize in old age an image of pater-nity; and, if the poet is to be believed, it is a sufficient compensation for all that is lost in the descent of years.

The Emirs, however, who had seldom heard Mohély talk in anything but monosyllables, were amazed at hearing him engage in a prolonged conversation in a low voice with the Dervish, and they reproached the two of them in friendly terms. The Emir agreed that his companions had just cause for offence, and yielded to his friend

Koramed the right of entertaining the stranger, recommending him, as he said, to induce him to talk for the pleasure and the instruction of the company at large.

‘Worthy Friend of Heaven,’ said Koramed, speaking aloud, ‘those noble and modest actions that you were describing to us just now in a manner that aroused our enthusiasm must unfortunately be more rare in armies than elsewhere: for daring deeds are the adornment of the soldier’s life, and we do not seek adornment in order to conceal it.’

‘I agree,’ said the Dervish, ‘that the soldier is not always contemplating heaven through the vizor of his helmet: that would be asking too much,’ he added gently. ‘But he should sometimes reflect that heaven is watching and judging him. And yet, brave Emirs, that fine generosity in the pursuit of glory, which in your modesty no doubt you think so uncommon, is by no means without example in your noble profession. I could mention as a proof the magnificent action of that hitherto unknown warrior who served the Sultan in the valleys of Platila. That was fourteen years ago, but the matter is constantly in Akbar’s mind—he forgets nothing but injuries. For a long time he sought his rescuer: he has now ordered a further search to be made, even more vigorous, if that were

possible, than before, because a service which remains unrewarded is a burden on that great heart, and he would think himself outdone by one whose loyalty he had not been able to requite.'

'That is indeed like him,' said Koramed; 'the most generous are the most grateful; but,' he added, 'I am very much afraid that the Sultan may be no more fortunate in his search than he was at first. The wise Mohély can tell you that we have as much interest as the Sultan himself in discovering and honouring this warrior, for if Akbar owes him his life, it is we who owe him Akbar. For the rest, believe me, my worthy Dervish, the matter is beyond human reach: we can only look to heaven. If the warrior was sent from on high, it was a miracle of which Akbar was especially deserving; if he inhabits the earth and has not disclosed himself, the miracle is even more extraordinary. What does Mohély think?'

'I think,' said Mohély, 'that if his deed was as I have heard it told, Akbar's rescuer was more than repaid by the safety of his king.'

'However that may be,' said the Dervish, 'it is known that in the royal capital an exact account of the affair has been drawn up and will be published throughout the world; and they have still not abandoned hope, I know not on what grounds, of finding the hero.'

'Whether they find him or not,' said Ghulam, 'he is a brave man. Let us drink to his health.'

'Let us all drink his health,' said the Dervish; 'the Prophet himself would drink it.'

Amid general acclamation, all the cups were freely charged with wine except that of the silent Emir, which was only half-full.

'Come, come, General,' said the Emirs jestingly, 'one would say that you do not like the Sultan.'

'As to that,' replied the Emir, with a significant gesture, 'I challenge the whole army. But I would rather keep my intellect to serve him than lose it in his honour.'

'Noble Emir,' said the Dervish, 'he whom the Sultan seeks could not have answered to better purpose.'

'I wonder,' said one, 'what reward the Sultan has promised if he comes forward.'

'He owes him nothing,' said Mohély warmly; 'a man who does his duty deserves reward no more than punishments.'

'Emir, Emir,' cried all the others, 'can you say that this man was merely doing his duty?'

'Less than his duty,' said the Emir; 'for a soldier to protect his master on such an occasion with his body, and lend him his arm for a weapon, is as instinctive an act as to put one's hand before one's eyes.'

‘Fortunately, noble Emir, the great Akbar does not think so,’ said the Dervish modestly; ‘for as soon as your lordships have reached the capital, you will hear proclaimed a Firman of His Highness promising a kingdom to the hero and a bag of gold to whomever discovers him.’

‘Have you seen the Firman?’ said one of the officers.

‘I have,’ said the Dervish. ‘It penetrated even to our holy habitations, and since, by favour of our sacred garb, we go about the world unmolested, our superiors have enjoined upon several of us to try to discover some trace of a man so unlike his fellows.’

‘Do you hope to find him?’ said Ghulam.

‘No more than the fish who at this very moment are disporting themselves in the waters of the Ganges and the Obi.’

‘Very well,’ said Ghulam, with the bold look that is born of wine and laughter, ‘the bag of gold is yours.’

‘And how may that be?’ said the Dervish, smiling pleasantly.

‘Yes, my worthy Dervish, the bag of gold belongs to you and the kingdom to me. Nay more: I appoint you my Grand Vizier and you may enter upon your duties at once.’

‘Pray explain this mystery to me,’ said the Dervish, still smiling.

'You are looking for this man,' said Ghulam, 'and you are in his company. Look well, the man who did this deed is before you.'

'My Lord Emir,' said the Dervish, 'I quite believe you capable of it, but you did not do it.'

'And who, my good Vizier, could dare to give me the lie?'

'My lord,' replied the old man, 'while the warrior was fighting near His Highness, his helmet became unfastened and the Sultan noticed on one of his cheeks a mark exactly resembling the blade of a lance.'

'Are you sure of what you tell me?'

'Yes, my lord, and further, that the mark is of a purple hue; but the purple in your cheeks,' he added, 'is due to the wine in which you so greatly delight.'

All the company applauded the Dervish: and for the first time since the caravan had started a smile lighted up the features of the silent Emir. Then, continuing the conversation: 'Believe me, Dervish,' nearly all of them said, one after the other, 'the man you are looking for, and upon whom the king has for fourteen years intended to confer a kingdom, is no longer of this world; he is a dead man who cannot answer the summons.'

'However that may be, my lords,' went on the good man, 'such a devotion can remain without

glory, since we do not know its author, but hardly without reward, since the Gods were witnesses of it. If he is not yet among them, they observe him among us with satisfaction, and the dearest of his aspirations is fulfilled.'

'Do you believe this?' said Mohély with emotion.

'Ah, noble Emir,' replied the Dervish, 'how can we doubt the Divine Justice?'

'It was a magnificent act, no doubt,' said one of the guests who was a highly zealous follower of the law of the Prophet, 'but how will his achievement avail him, if he is not a servant of the Prophet?'

'That will hardly prevent the Prophet looking favourably upon him,' said the Dervish; 'for there is nothing upon earth that he finds more worthy of admiration than courage and virtue.'

'But,' said a Hindu who was listening (for as has been explained, there were men of different religions among the company), 'if the great Indra, from his throne on high, let fall a glance upon the exploit of your hero, do you suppose that he would take any account of it? He only grants his protection to the penitent saints who come to lament in solitude the sins of the world.'

'The ordinary man,' answered the Dervish, 'may feel in need of the intercession of some pious souls who will serve to shield him against the wrath of heaven, and whose tears extinguish the

lightning which is often about to strike him. But the hero of whom we are speaking needs no protector. The heavenly form of the mighty Indra is covered with innumerable eyes whose arrowy vision pierces into the very life of human-kind. And those eyes wait, sometimes for a thousand centuries, for an act so untainted by any human interest.'

'Alas,' said a Persian, who was also conversant with theology, 'I am grieved to hear of so much goodness that is not illumined by the doctrines of Zoroaster, so suitably named the Sun of all our thoughts. For your warrior, brave and generous as you describe him, will never hold converse with the Peris and the Jinns, and will languish in the dungeons of Arimanes until the Friend of Good, Ormuzd, has concluded the period of his probation.'

'Wherever the great man may be,' said the Dervish with dignity, 'he is happy. His reward is everywhere because it is in himself. He who has done a noble action without any motive of pride or of interest believes in a God who approves of him or carries in himself a God that inspires him. It may be that he knows not Mahomet, Zoroaster, Brahma, or the rest; but he is known by Him whom they have all worshipped in their own manner and who knows what is due to such splendid souls.'

‘Wise and pious Dervish,’ said Mohély, ‘are you not attaching too much value to human actions, which are dictated by the very heart that beats in a man’s own breast, and which he would blush not to have performed had it been possible.’

‘The inspiration which you describe, illustrious Emir, is not by any means found in all human hearts; but it proves at least that there are some who answer, without being aware of it, to the call of the Divinity who speaks to them in secret, and who obey Him while they believe they are fulfilling their own nature. Happy is he who does not admire his own good deeds. Still, my lords, the quality I have just described is not unique, and if I were not afraid of abusing the consideration with which I have been honoured . . .’

‘Never fear for that, holy father,’ was heard from all sides.

‘I will venture to relate you an incident almost entirely unknown, but which, nevertheless, is certainly recorded above. In this case it was not a question of saving the life of a Sultan, but simply of a man.’

‘That is quite enough,’ said Mohély.

‘You must surely remember,’ went on the Dervish, ‘that fatal day on which the proud city of Lakhnauti perished in the conflagration of its buildings and the slaughter of its inhabitants, and

disappeared from the face of the earth like marsh fires from the surface of a swamp.'

'Indeed,' cried several Emirs at once, 'we remember it well.'

'Yes, my lords, in that hour of destruction, one of your companions in arms (may his life be long continued!) observed approaching him, at the fall of dusk, a poor wretch who begged for mercy amidst all the riot and the slaughter, and offered him a bag filled with diamonds. The warrior, moved to compassion (I can still see him), stopped, threw his huge cloak over the shoulders of the unfortunate creature, reached out his hand and helped him to climb up behind him on to the crupper of his saddle. Then, under the guidance of the unhappy being whom he had rescued, they made their way through the lamentable city, now given over to pillage, fire and massacre. The steed on which they rode picked his way among a tumbled mass of shattered furniture, tables, goblets, precious vases and magnificent carpets; among capitals and fragments of columns heaped in confusion; among the remains of altars and limbs of broken gods, scattered everywhere in a blood-stained mire like traps beneath their feet. The leaden roofs were melting and the roof-trees were in flames. Entire walls fell crashing to the ground, sometimes bringing with them huge

burning beams which lay smoking in vast heaps of debris, and blocked their road. But the perils of their passage were as nothing to the horror of the scene. On every side were fragments of human bodies of both sexes and all ages, still quivering with life. The youth dying at the feet of his father whom he was trying vainly to protect: nearby, a mother fell transfixed upon her little one whom she was hiding from the sword. Old men and matrons begging for life, and outraged virgins praying for death. Farther off the dying shrieks of a company of prisoners whom the soldiers, maddened by slaughter and sated with pillage, were brutally massacring to save themselves the trouble of carrying them away. Nevertheless, the kindly warrior continued his course through the lamentations of the victims and the even more saddening exultation of the conquerors; he was often compelled to force a passage, sword in hand, through the soldiery, who were now out of control and deaf to any orders. When at last they emerged from these scenes of horror, they reached, by roads known to the suppliant, a certain gallery of a disused mine which traversed a mountain not far from the city and came out on the farther side.'

Here the Dervish stopped, and most of the Emirs knew not how to praise the hero's noble compassion. Ghulam alone showed no emotion.

'Death and destruction,' he cried with all the contempt of the toper for everything but wine, 'what unselfishness! But surely the excellent fellow had the little bag of diamonds in his hand.'

'That is so,' said the Dervish.

'Well then, by Mahomet,' continued Ghulam, 'at such a price the most pious of men would save the life of the Devil.'

'The bag was refused,' said the worthy Dervish. ' "Keep your diamonds!" the good Emir replied, "and devote them to good works. Alas! wherever you go, you will find unhappiness, for men have no affection for each other."

' "In the name of heaven, where you are beloved," said the stranger, "tell me to whom I owe the remainder of my life."

' "To a man," said the warrior, "who felt a real pleasure in being of service to you and is truly sorry to leave you. But farewell, my duties call me back." And, leaving his cloak so that the other might have some protection against the chill of the underground passage, he disappeared.'

'Your story is very detailed,' said Koramed. 'I suppose you know the man with the bag of diamonds.'

'Alas! my lords, he stands before you, perhaps in the presence of his saviour, but unable to recognize him.'

'To the health of the Dervish!' shouted Mohély himself, and, instead of merely touching his cup with his lips as he had done hitherto, he drained it completely; then, warmly pressing the hand of the Dervish, he added, 'May heaven continue to protect you.'

'What!' said Koramed, 'can you not recall the features of your rescuer?'

'Unfortunately the sun had set,' said the Dervish, 'and in that hour of tears and desolation . . . Ah, if heaven would restore him to my eyes I should look on him as a son.'

'But did he persist in his refusal to tell you his name?'

'I ventured to ask him once more at the entrance to the underground passage, but he replied, "What would it profit you to know it?"'

"Why surely," said I, again offering him my treasure, "so that I may know which of my fellow-men to recommend to heaven in my prayers."

"Let your prayers be on behalf of all," he said, persisting in his refusal; "they stand in greater need of your prayers than of your diamonds."

'While he was talking in this way, I raised my eyes to the Dwellers on High, to thank them for so fortunate an encounter. I was then about to look towards him, but he had gone. Wherever he is,' said the Dervish, wiping the tears from his eyes,

'he is content, or he will achieve contentment. He will find what he seeks.'

'I am delighted to hear it,' said Ghulam. 'But you, my excellent Dervish, if you are seeking a good glass of Greek wine, address yourself to me. Come, a glass to the Reverend Father's health.'

'Ah, my lords,' said the Dervish gently, 'I must go no farther. The life of the camp is not quite that of the monastery.'

'Very well, my holy friend,' said Koramed, 'you may buy yourself off with a story.'

'I am afraid, my lords,' he replied humbly, 'that the conversation of a Dervish would end by being as little to your taste as his way of life; and indeed, what stories could I tell to those who are themselves the heroes of so many?'

'A truce to your diffidence,' said Koramed: 'you must have seen with what interest we listened to you, and the solemn Mohély himself set us the example.'

'No one here needed it,' said Mohély; 'but I should suggest to you, my reverend friend, that you do not talk of the events of the war, about which you can tell our friends nothing; as befits your condition as a man of peace, look for your precepts elsewhere than in the clash of arms. The world has laid them down at the feet of Akbar. A

new life is beginning for us, and we must find a new way to live it.'

'Very well, noble warriors,' said the Dervish, 'I submit to you, as the rest of the world has done, and, since you insist, I will relate to you a singular incident in the life of a man of peace, a wise man who no longer exists, if the word can be used of one who is living a more excellent life. The matter was not in itself one of importance, and might seem best suited to amuse children. But, as was observed by the Pundit of Morani, small things may contain great ones: the eye of the observer is small, but the entire heavens are reflected in it.

'Far, far from here lived an old man, versed in all the wisdom of the earth, all its laws, and, what is more important, all its virtues: gentle, courteous, hospitable, beloved of all who knew him, loving even those whom he did not know, and convinced that here below men of all conditions, of all countries, and of all ages exist only to serve each other. He was accustomed, although feeble and infirm, on certain days to go from his dwelling to a temple and commune with the Divinity in meditation. For if we may believe the holy Arjuna, meditation, for an instant at least, delivers the human soul from its prison, and permits it to breathe celestial air. He went on foot, and though his destination was only an hour's journey for a man in full

vigour, the old man took three hours to reach it. But while on his way, it might well have seemed that the Deutas, the Peris, the Munis conversed with him to relieve the tedium of his journey. One day, as he was returning quietly from the temple to his dwelling, holding his two gloves in one hand and not thinking to put them on, absorbed as he was in prayer and contemplation, he felt the first chill of evening, and began to think about protecting himself against it; but he noticed that one of his gloves was missing. It could not be far away, and he soon saw it lying in the moonlight; when he had reached the place, he tried to pick it up. But his back was stiff and cold, and he could not bend down far enough to reach it. After three or four vain attempts, he had to give it up and continue on his way; but scarcely had he taken a few steps before he went back to the place where the glove had fallen, not to try and pick it up again, but to put the other down beside it.'

'My good Dervish, you have lost your wits,' said Ghulam, who was still drinking.

'Be silent, Ghulam,' said Mohély in an imperious and indignant tone which he had never used before, 'and respect our guest.' And then, laying his hand on his scimitar and looking fixedly at the Emir, he added, 'respect him as you would my father.' He turned to the Dervish and said

gently, 'Proceed, reverend father, and woe be to those who do not give heed to what you tell us!'

'Where was I?' asked the Dervish.

'The worthy Brahmin,' said Mohély, 'had just dropped his second glove beside the first.'

'Yes,' said the Dervish, 'he had said to himself, "If I only bring one of my gloves home, of what use will it be to me? And of what use will the other be to the passer-by who picks it up, whereas if I put this one, which is almost useless to me, beside the other which I cannot pick up, the man who finds both of them together may get some service from them and will give thanks to his Jinn. The object has little value, but any feeling of satisfaction is always worth something."'

Ghulam, who was still drinking and whose appreciation of this worthy action was somewhat obscured by the fumes of wine, began to laugh, and tried to induce his neighbour to join him. Mohély looked at him once more in frowning disapproval, but fearing that his remonstrance would be the less effective as the wine grew more so, he whispered in the Dervish's ear: 'Let us go out: let us leave our friends to the cheerful immolation of what remains of the rest of their reason, and if you agree we will look for a place beyond that plantation of palms, where no one will come and interrupt our conversation.'

They went out of the tent together, through the plantation, and came to a little wood, following a devious path which concealed them from the curiosity of the rest. And when they reached the edge of the wood, they soon found the place they were looking for.

It was at the foot of one of those green and smiling hills that lie far and wide round the royal city: a triple row of palm-, date- and coconut-trees crowned the uneven surface of the summit. Lower down the slope were scattered here and there plantations of fruit-trees, clumps of fragrant shrubs, and rose gardens; and, in between them, lovely expanses of herbage on which flocks and herds disported themselves. The hill was based on a foundation of rock like a wall which nature had seen fit to construct in concave fashion. It followed all the twists and turns of the ground above it, and its recesses offered many a refuge to the shepherds and the herdsmen. On the top of the wall flowering shrubs grew at random, and their spreading foliage added here and there to the natural coolness of the place, which was ceaselessly renewed by a thousand streamlets of fresh water emerging through fissures in the rock, and uniting at length in a placid pool, on the edge of which flattened stones covered with thick moss invited our two friends to rest themselves. Here, all the sights

which had just delighted them so greatly, the lovely landscape, the green hill, the palm-trees that adorned it, the trees scattered over its slopes, grass and flocks, caves and mossy seats, and their own reflections appeared faithfully reproduced in this calm water as in a picture surrounded by a border of flowers. This smiling prospect was again called to their minds by sounds and harmonies that fell upon their ears: the lowing of heifers, the bleating of lambs, the songs of the shepherds, the light rustle of moving leaves, the twitter of the birds, the humming of the bees, everything spoke to the soul of innocence and peace. Everything seemed to say to the entranced spectator, 'Here shall you stay: nowhere else can you be as happy.'

'Kamadeva (Spirit of Love)! Kamadeva!' cried the Dervish in an ecstasy; 'thy goodness exceeds even thy power. In thy paternal care thou hast provided for everything that men can need. And yet they are not satisfied. Is it thy fault or theirs? Why dost thou offer them a happiness which does not arouse their desires? Or rather, why hast thou permitted them to conceive desires which do not lead to happiness, and which, like an arrow aimed too high, overshoot the mark? It is true that men are in ignorance, since they do not seek thee, but, once again, whence comes their ignorance? Thou

hast given them eyes, canst thou not open them? Thou hast lit within them the secret lamp of their understanding, canst thou not make it more powerful? Thy benefits are for all: why is it that they are known to the wise man alone? But I may not blaspheme thee. I will rather ask how it is that I cannot fathom the depths of thy intention. Thou hast willed that the noblest of earthly creatures, man, should create his own happiness, so that he may be the more contented. It has seemed good to thee to deal with him in accordance with his dignity, and to ordain that he shall find happiness in well-doing, and well-doing in happiness.' Then, kneeling on the rock on which he had first sat down: 'O Munis and Peris,' said he, 'O Deutas, O Messinguez and all ye Divinities of this place, whoever and how many you may be, look down from the lofty ether in which you dwell, from the crystal habitations which the eye of the Child of Earth cannot discern, and protect me. I place myself under your guard, and I thank you for the first ray of serenity with which you have illumined my heart. But if it be not presumptuous to ask yet more, if a humble penitent, overwhelmed till now by grief and by regret, counts for something in thy sight, look upon and read within my heart.' After these last words, several times repeated, the Dervish, who had become unconscious of all his

surroundings, raised his eyes and his hands to the vault of heaven, and spoke no more. The Emir, who was disturbed by his silence and his motionless attitude, ventured to interrupt his meditation. 'Rise, my father,' he said, 'while your spirit is lost in ecstasy, your body is ill at ease. Sit down here: the moss is softer and thicker; and condescend, I beg you, to listen to a confidence of which I must needs unburden myself.'

'Speak on, my son,' said the Dervish, coming to himself. 'I have no ears but for your story, and my thoughts do but await your questions.'

They sat down accordingly side by side on the same bank. Mohély turned with respect towards the Dervish: he took his hand with affection, pressed it warmly in his own, and looking at him fixedly, 'Holy father,' said he, 'do you believe in sympathy?'

'My son,' replied the Dervish, 'there is nothing else in the world, and at this moment, above all, how can I doubt of its existence?'

'You must know, then, holy father, that since your arrival I have become suddenly conscious of a disturbance of the mind, a confusion of the feelings—yet not at all unpleasant—which you have perhaps observed.'

'Noble Emir,' said the Dervish, 'I should have observed it the better, had I myself felt it the less.'

But my own agitation did not prevent my noticing yours.'

'Well then, my father (for I like to call you so),' said the Emir, 'you will pardon the boldness which you have aroused in me . . . are you really a penitent?'

'My son, every man should be a penitent. Whose life is without fault?'

'I had thought, my father, that you could only be weeping at the sins of others.'

'Alas,' said the Dervish, 'my tears will never suffice to wipe out my own sins, or those of a son for whom I am searching far and wide over the earth.'

'You! A son, my good Dervish?'

'Alas, yes, my dear lord, and O heaven! what a son! I did not deserve him. Imagine, united in the same being, all the perfections that heaven commonly distributes with a niggardly hand among several favoured mortals. Goodness, good sense, charm, strength, and beauty.'

'Can one believe the partiality of a father?' said the Emir.

'Yes, my tears must convince you,' said the Dervish. 'And it is I—I that diverted, stayed, and perhaps cut short, the course of his magnificent destiny.'

'Forgive me,' he continued, 'you may one day

know the illusions of a father. I hope you may never know his sorrows. Once more, Emir, forgive me my tears.'

'Indeed, indeed, my worthy Dervish, let them flow freely: mine shall mingle with them, and may they have power to soften their bitterness. How you must both have suffered! You, deprived of a son such as your affection has described; and he, deprived of a father such as I see you, affectionate, kind and sympathetic: your speech and your demeanour are lessons of love and of peace, and like another Brahma you bear all humanity in your heart.'

'Ah, my dear friend, I have not always been as your generosity imagines. My life has been spent in contending with my weaknesses, and too often without success. It is not that my mind has not always sought after true justice, but more than once I have lost my way even while I sought it. My reason, too weak and too slow, has not always been able to warn me against sudden gusts of passion; and if to-day their outbursts seem to have lost their violence, that is the work of the passage of years and of repentance . . . Yes, my worthy friend, of repentance: for seventeen years I have been expiating my harshness towards the least imperfect of the children of men.'

'Seventeen years!' cried Mohély, lifting his

hands to heaven: and then, recollecting himself with all the embarrassment of a man who thinks he has displayed too much feeling, or is afraid of having been guilty of an indiscretion: 'Proceed, my good Dervish. Your friend undertakes to interrupt you no more.' However, he repeated in a low voice and as if in spite of himself, 'Seventeen years!'

'Yes, my friend, it is seventeen years since my son, the gentlest and best beloved of sons, fled from the habitation of his parents; he took our happiness away with him and left but mourning within its walls. Nothing could have kept me at home except that my father was still living. My father! and I knew too well what it was like to be abandoned by a son. I would not desert my father. I stayed with him, grieving for my errors in private, but exerting myself to provide him with those alleviations of which I was myself deprived. After two years I had to lament his departure from among us, and I had scarcely paid him the final honours, than I could think of nothing but searching for my son throughout the world. I gave up all I had: I freed all my slaves, for the unfortunate were, I thought, unseen enemies threatening all conditions of our mortal society like a menacing cloud. And I thought that my splendid son, who was now at the mercy of all the arrows of fortune,

might have fallen into slavery. This idea, so shocking for a father, quite overcame me. I got together all the diamonds, rubies and precious stones that I could, so that I might have about me the means of buying the precious boy's freedom, if it should please the Gods, to whom I prayed unceasingly, that I should find my son in that condition so unworthy of our humanity.'

'Best and kindest of fathers!' cried Mohély, pressing his hand.

'Or,' continued the Dervish, 'as some poor addition to his fortune, if some *Amadya*, some Jinn, lord of some flashing star, had condescended to let fall upon my son a beam of his favour.'

'Good Dervish,' replied the Emir, raising his eyes to heaven, 'the true Jinns that protect mankind are fathers like the one I see before me.'

'When I had made my plans,' went on the old man, 'I took my departure in the middle of the night, alone and disguised as you see me now, so that I was able to pass freely through the friendly or enemy camps which in those days were scattered over Iran and Turan; and when I had crossed, without being recognized, the river that may not be recrossed, I traversed various regions of the earth with no other guide but the inspirations of my heart.'

'A noble courage,' broke in Mohély, 'showing

clearly that the brave heart of the one-time soldier is never darkened.'

'But had I told you, my lord, that I had once borne arms?'

'Good Dervish, how else should I have known it? Though, indeed, your own fearlessness would betray it: for you must needs be fearless to traverse these vast tracts of country alone and defenceless. I cannot think of it without alarm.'

'My friend, the Gods are a most excellent escort to those who trust in them.'

'But what of the robbers who infest all Asia?'

'Robbers have no dealings with Dervishes.'

'Yet you carried something that would have tempted—a tiger-skin bag, if I remember rightly.'

'I remember very well,' said the Dervish with astonishment, 'telling you while at table about a bag filled with diamonds, but I do not remember having told you that it was made of tiger-skin.'

'But, worthy Dervish,' said the Emir, 'how else should I have known it?'

'No matter, dear lord: the bag of which we are speaking reminds me every day of the first beginning of that unhappy youth's troubles and of my own; for they were chiefly due to his reckless passion for the chase, which made him forget for a moment that he was my son and me forget that I was his father.'

‘A forgetfulness,’ said Mohély, ‘for which doubtless you and he have made amends.’

‘Noble warrior, if I were not every moment blaming myself for taking advantage of that kindly interest which imparts a secret pleasure to the sorrows that I am confiding in you . . .’

‘Well, my father?’

‘I would begin the story at an earlier stage. But I should be afraid of repaying your excessive goodness with my all too tedious narrative.’

‘My father,’ said Mohély, in a voice charged with emotion, ‘you may read from my expression whether I am likely to find anything that you tell me tedious.’

‘You must know, then,’ said the Dervish, ‘that no living creature has ever given his family such joy and hope and pride as he whom I tried to describe to you. Everything about the child seemed above our common nature: his beauty, his sweetness, his grace, strength and intelligence, everything marked him out for the highest destinies. Ixora, his gentle mother, received the first intimation of this in a moment of delirium, or rather of divine ecstasy, that preceded her delivery, and it was thus that she related it to me that very day:

‘“I was not asleep, but absorbed in thinking of the future of the life I still carried within me, when

the surrounding objects faded away, and I felt myself suddenly transported, by what enchantment I know not, into the midst of a vast garden filled with all sorts of flowers which seemed to open as I looked at them. While I was marvelling at this miracle, a delightful melody which suddenly broke forth above my head caused me to turn my eyes to heaven, and I thought I saw all the Divinities that protect mankind coming towards me. The splendour of their beauty outshone all other illumination: clouds of divers colours were their palanquins, which laid them gently down among the banks of flowers that grew on all sides. These Goddesses carried one and all a golden bow in their hands, but their expression and their gentle demeanour displayed so much benevolence that their weapons caused me no alarm. They soon scattered in various directions, and each of them plucked one of the mysterious flowers and fitted it like an arrow to her bow-string. Then, standing in a circle, they suddenly shot their arrows simultaneously at a slender little plant that seemed to be just coming up in the midst of this lovely garden. All the arrows left their bows and hit the mark at the same moment and, in the twinkling of an eye, I saw the young plant transformed into a mighty tree which was instantly covered with all the flowers that had been plucked. The Goddesses

stepped upon their clouds, looking with affection upon the tree and saying to it, 'Lovely tree, you will grow even as far as heaven, for we will watch over you.' "

'My wife, who enjoyed the favour of heaven,' continued the Dervish, 'found, when she awoke from her vision, a child whose birth had caused her no pain and in whom all that she had dreamed appeared to be realized. His beauty first delighted all who saw him; but soon afterwards we had to admire more precious favours of heaven. We saw the shining dawn of his intelligence, as one may see the peaks of the highest mountains lit up long before the rest of the landscape. Eager to learn and to understand, he was soon acquainted, as if by magic, with various subjects which, in nearly everybody, call for prolonged study: and every month, in the sphere of *Sarasvati* (Science), his progress was such as another child would have been glad to make in a whole year. Unmoved by the pleasures of his age, he mainly lived for his intelligence: every occupation that did not seem to extend and adorn it seemed beneath him, and his body became almost a stranger to him.'

'Once more, Dervish,' said the Emir, 'can we credit everything that the eyes of a father may see?'

'Alas, I have no witness,' said the Dervish; 'but clearer eyes than mine, those of my venerable

father, were of considerable assistance to me. "You are proud of your Idalmen," said he one day, "but his interests ought to be more dear to you than your own pride. Believe me, if you want him to progress as far as he doubtless can you must change the direction, and go no quicker than time itself. In his early years there is more need of games than of instruction. You should consider whether this life of study, which has so much attraction for this dear child, may not injure his health, for his body calls for great care in these early days, in order that it may later be in a better condition to serve his soul. You should consider whether too soft a life (which is the misfortune of our age and station) may not weaken his character and make him too dependent upon others, for the habit of seeking help makes us incapable of helping ourselves. Let us look to the future of Idalmen: let us be apprehensive of the caresses and the praises which every one delights in showering upon him. They may in time bestow upon him that worst of all faults, pride. Yes, my son, pride, which hides our fellow-men from our sight: pride which prevents us from loving and from being loved—of both of which we all stand so greatly in need. Let him give up for a few years," continued my father, "his books and his masters: your son has hardly reached his tenth year: he has ample

time in which to come back to them. If you will take my advice, accustom him to the exercises of skill and even of strength, which really turn a child into a man. In whatever rank of life our lot may have placed us, the habit of labour, in some measure at least, places us on a level with the rest of humanity. Labour prepares our body for the thousand blows which threaten us so long as we may live, and whatever may be our part in the tumult of the world; and at least ensures that our limbs shall be our faithful servants and that, unlike so many enfeebled creatures, we shall be independent of the help of others. Reflect, too," continued the good old man, "that according to the holy laws of our country, our Idalmen is destined not for the condition of Holy Man or Brahmin, but for a soldier; for since they, alas, exist, we cannot do without them: provide him early with all that may preserve his life and assure his reputation."

'These were my father's words, and his last reflection impressed itself on my mind. I looked on my Idalmen as one destined by *Adaristo*, or Destiny, to an heroic immortality, and this became the sole motive and object of all my cares and my instruction. I placed all manner of weapons in his hands: I had them made of a size suited to his height, and I took pleasure in teaching him their use.'

'I love to observe,' said Mohély, looking at the Dervish with softened eyes, how the entire thread of a son's life is untwined beforehand in his father's thoughts.'

'His second education,' went on the Dervish, 'was no less happy than the first. It might have been supposed that here also my Idalmen had been endowed at birth with more than others could acquire. He brought down the deer in the forests. He vaulted upon the wildest horses in mid-career. He could throw down bulls by seizing their horns with his still childish hands. His aim was unerring, and the eagle, almost invisible to other eyes, would fall from the highest clouds transfixed at his feet. Yet such sports did not succeed in hardening his heart. He never lost sight in his exercises of the advantage which might one day come from them—not in society—for such an idea was still beyond his mind, but for his family and for me, whom he hoped to support in my failing years. It was not that he was indifferent to the satisfaction which men naturally derive from everything which they do with skill; on the contrary, the bow and the sling, in which he excelled, became a passion with him. They were his favourite amusement until his twelfth year, and I watched him return every morning laden with the victims of his prowess. One day, however,

he came back with empty hands, and I asked him the reason. He had just read a verse by a Hindu Pundit which had roused his attention—it was this:

“On all that lives let thy sweet mercy fall.”

And—will you believe me, good Emir?—from that moment he resolved to give up hunting all but savage animals. He looked on them as the slaves of Shiv, the God of Destruction, and, according to his youthful notions, it seemed just to make war upon them in defence of the rest of creation.

‘A feeling of pride soon came to disturb his pleasures. Idalmen had finished reading in the night another Purana, and he had noticed the following maxim, intended at once to elevate and to soften the mind:

“There is no glory without danger.”

Thenceforward, tormented by the first prickings of a noble ardour that began to burn in his veins, he became convinced that man does not rise truly above himself except by a courage that may serve mankind; through this he leaves the common herd and becomes the guardian of his fellows. Tortured by this idea, he blushed to think that he had only used his strength, skill and cunning in perfect safety. Soon no enterprise that was free from danger had any attraction for him. At first he said

nothing about this to me; but without my knowledge he tested in various ways and discovered the extent of his strength and of his courage and, ever eager to surpass himself, he was always meditating fresh exploits.

‘One day,’ continued the Dervish, ‘he heard tell of a tiger that was doing much mischief in a neighbouring district. He immediately gave secret orders for a tiger hunt to be organized for the following day; he arranged in advance for the employment of the hounds and assigned to the archers and spearmen the positions that they were to occupy. When all his orders had been given for daybreak on the following day, he started, as was his habit, in the middle of the night and in advance of his company. I do not know whether he wanted to win for himself all the honour of the exploit which he was proposing, or whether (and I like to think so) he was apprehensive of exposing his fellows to his perilous enjoyments. He had already covered his tracks by various detours in the vast, sombre forest which he had traversed a thousand times and which he knew as well as his father’s gardens. He was in pursuit of his prey, and while all his following, uneasy and at a loss, were looking for him in vain, he was searching for the slightest traces of his quarry. He soon came upon considerable and quite recent tracks which

betrayed the enemy for whom he was looking. He immediately dismounted, not wishing to expose even his horse to his own danger, and tied him to a palm-tree; and thrusting aside the thorny brushwood, he observed his terrible quarry standing motionless on the outskirts of the wood. My son was already close to him and unobserved. He was just raising his battle-axe to strike when the tiger, attracted by a flock of sheep which he had observed far off on the plain, leapt with the speed of an arrow in their direction. He had hardly begun to tear his first victim to pieces when Idalmen, as quick as he was courageous, struck him a blow on the head with his axe, which laid bare part of his brain and compelled him to leave his hold. The great beast, though on the point of collapse, grew more savage than ever: he reared up and tried in his last convulsions to seize my son in his terrible claws. Without a sign of fear, he cut off one of the fore-paws with his axe, but the other claw, deeply buried in the boy's cheek, was already tearing out a strip of flesh, when the tiger, whose blood and strength were exhausted, fell stone dead at the feet of his conqueror.

‘However, the company of huntsmen, who were some distance behind their young leader, only saw the combat from far off, and were only able to reach the spot at the moment of victory; but as

soon as they perceived the dreadful wound, their cries of joy were turned to lamentations. My son restored their courage: he congratulated himself on having led no one into danger, had his wound bound up, mounted his horse and returned in high spirits to the house of his father.

‘I had stayed at home pretending to be in ignorance of his plans, his preparations, and his departure, and wishing with a sort of paternal delicacy to leave to my ambitious Idalmen that pleasure, so delicious and so dear to youth, which is always a little over-confident, of arranging everything himself. However, after a few hours, a feeling of some uneasiness compelled me to leave my occupation and to go and look for him in the depths of the forest. Soon the songs of victory, the blasts of trumpets, the neighing of horses, and the barking of dogs indicated where I should find him; and I saw my unhappy boy coming towards me with his head bound up much as yours is at present. For I must tell you, my friend, when I partly drew aside the curtain of your tent, I seemed to be looking upon my son as I saw him then; and you called him to mind so far as a man of your height and age can call to mind a boy of thirteen. But, to finish what I had begun to tell you, as soon as I had recognized from a distance my young huntsman in this guise, I knew not what

to think, and approached him more in astonishment than in alarm. He displayed his usual calm demeanour, and his customary unmoved expression. I even heard him talk to one of his companions with a gaiety and liveliness that were perhaps assumed—for his love was capable of any effort. None the less his gait, which was slower than of ordinary, began to disquiet me. I soon saw the concern and fear on the faces of his companions: and then the pallor, so strange to the countenance of my Idalmen, and the blood which penetrated all the twisted folds of the bandage. Ah, my dear lord, what a dreadful sight for a father is the blood of his son. However, I remained master of myself, as he had done, and examined the gash with an affectation of self-control. I dressed the wound with my own hands as best I could and led the boy back to his mother, the sweet and gentle Ixora. I had taken care to have her informed of what had happened just before our arrival, but at the approach of her Idalmen she was seized with a trembling in all her limbs and fell to the ground. We examined the wound again, and found that it was more alarming than dangerous. Conversant as I was with the arts that preserve our mortal life, I thought that the clean flesh and pure blood of his magnificent youth could not fail to heal; and indeed, the wound

closed in a few days, with the help of certain essences that were known to me, and merely left a scar which he will carry to the end of his days—may he still be doing so! If ever his father should see it again . . . !’

‘You will, my good Dervish, you will!’

‘Emir, you take a pleasure in flattering my hopes. You are like the compassionate Jinn who showed me his face once again this very night in a dream; but it was only a dream, and how am I to believe it?’

‘Holy father,’ said the Emir, ‘evil men who have abandoned themselves to evil Jinns receive but lying counsels in their dreams; but it is not thus with the good Jinns who watch over the slumber of the just.’

‘Now, dear friend, I shall expose to you my heart in all its weakness.’

‘Say rather in its goodness, wise Dervish.’

‘After our Idalmen was cured, when we looked at the scar that distinguished him from all his fellows, my wife wept for the loss of her son’s beauty; for he had been the handsomest of the children of men. I, on the contrary, was proud of it. I always contemplated it with a glowing admiration, and I saw already my Idalmen marked with the emblem of heroes. This notion, so touching to a father’s heart, has always sustained me

since he disappeared from my sight, and, in the midst of my sorrows, shines like a dim star among dark clouds.'

'The Gods have means of consoling those who serve them; they will never abandon you, worthy father.'

'There is one thing that I cannot tell you without a blush of shame; but the earnestness with which you seem to listen to me is as sweet as delights that are dreamed of when in pain.'

'Speak, speak, good Dervish!' said the Emir, whose voice shook as he spoke. 'My soul—and you may see it in my eyes—is moved as never before by the sweet emotions of respect and affection, and by some feeling that is strange to me, but which I am proud to see that you share.'

'Very well, my lord, you will read the secrets of a father's heart—you will see how far his reason can go astray. When the mighty Akbar, who had come back from his conquests, summoned to his presence once more that warrior who had saved his life, and had described him as marked with a scar exactly like that of my Idalmen, I shivered within me. I recalled his cold courage, and I dared to think that he alone among all the warriors could have been chosen by heaven for so great a deed. Lamentable illusion,' went on the old man with a painful sigh: 'and it was a further assurance of my

son's death. For if this champion existed, he would be known to all the world. Every man of war and every mortal would look for this unmistakable sign which amid so many perils caught the eye of the great Akbar and, O Idalmen, your father would see it once more. But it is in vain that I seek it: Idalmen is no more.' And he burst into tears.

'Good Dervish,' said the Emir, 'Heaven finds nothing impossible, and sometimes causes joy to spring from the midst of the bitterest sorrow like the living spring that bursts from the rock. Never, never cease to hope: despair in mortals is offensive in the eyes of their invisible Friends. Would you not have thought that the son of your heart was lost to you if you had discovered sooner the enterprise which you lately narrated to me with such horror. Yet you saw your son again and, wounded as he was, he came to lay at your feet the tiger's spoils!'

'He certainly did so,' said the Dervish, 'but I do not remember telling you so.'

'But, my good Dervish,' said the Emir as before, 'how else could I have known it?'

'You may well imagine,' said the Dervish, continuing his story, 'that I refrained from any reproaches or even any observations on the matter to my young son until he was perfectly cured. I knew him to be so quick and impetuous, and

withal so sensitive and submissive, that at such a moment the slightest mark of displeasure on my part might have endangered his reason and even his life. Why did I not always display the same forethought? At last, when his mother and I were free of all apprehension, I reprimanded him severely. I sentenced him to three months without hunting of any kind, and I forbade him to hunt the leopard and the tiger for two whole years, under the penalty of a father's curse.'

'Oh, what a word from a father's lips!'

'I know it too well, my son! It is a thunderbolt which strikes even more certainly him that hurls it.'

'And then, Dervish?'

'My lord, how can I find the strength to tell you the rest. Six months, ten months, a year, went by; my son, instead of passing his days and nights in the forest hunting wild animals, spent them quietly in cultivating his mind and his understanding, and in seeking for truth under the illusions that disfigure it and the symbols that conceal it. It was delightful to watch him daily mastering something new, and in some sort ascending from the animal nature to the Divine: ever studying the Puranas, the Vedas, the Philosophers who have guessed the riddle of the world, and taking especial pleasure in cultivating the sweet and sanctified art of poetry, which he regarded as the

language of heaven. "The Gods speak it," he would say, "and men can hardly stammer it."

'But one fatal day I was walking between my wife and my old father, in a grove not far from our habitation, when a terrified family came and threw themselves at our feet and told us that an enormous lion, not content with devouring their flocks and herds, was attacking men also with even greater savagery. They hardly dared to leave their houses, and twelve victims had perished within the space of one moon. They now went about in companies, and lights were kept burning day and night before all their doors to keep off the enemy. The whole district was in a state of alarm, and they begged me in the name of all the fathers and mothers in the neighbourhood, to send a band of bold huntsmen under the command of my brave Idalmen, whose last exploit had become generally known. I was their ruler, and I was also a man. I was too well acquainted with the duties of humanity, and, at the same time, with those of my position, to refuse to listen to so just an appeal; and without saying anything on the matter of my son, I sent the unfortunate people away with the promise of speedy assistance. My beloved son was at the moment nearer than I thought him, seated at the foot of a date-palm. He was, as usual, engaged in reading a Purana, but so situated that

he could hear us without being seen. It so happened that the band of suppliants, when they left us, passed, as chance would have it, at no great distance from him. They stopped and prostrated themselves, flung themselves at his feet as they had done at mine, and bedewed them with tears. They called him Vishnu returned to earth, and thanked him then and there for the protection which they would receive at his hands. The good Idalmen, touched by their suffering, flattered by their tributes, consumed as I told you by the desire to be of service, and perhaps also weary of the long idleness to which I had sentenced him, for the first time conceived the plan of escaping my vigilance. He began by various inquiries on such important matters as the lie of the country, the movements of the lion, the times and places where he was most often seen; then, when he had collected all the information that he wanted, he disguised himself as an ordinary huntsman and went off alone in the middle of the night without even making known his intentions to those whom he wished to assist, who were prudently waiting for the dawn in order to join our huntsmen and to travel in greater safety.

“The hour of retirement arrived and had long been past, but Idalmen did not appear. “Where is he? Where is he?” everybody asked one another.

We waited, first in uneasiness and then in agitation. We called for him and shouted his name: all the gardens and porticos rang with the name of Idalmen. A hundred torches moved in all directions in quest of him, and every corner and every thicket was searched again and again. At last, after much unprofitable wandering, I reached the foot of the tree where my son had been reading. I found the book still open, and a passage, which he was no doubt reading when the peasants came to beg for his assistance, was marked in his hand. This is it: *If you hear the cry of the unfortunate, be deaf to all else.*

'Alas! while we were searching for him by the light of so many torches, Idalmen was walking alone through the dark night and through the tangled forests, thinking no more of rest than of his perils. By daylight he arrived in the district that had been indicated to him on the previous day, and observed the power possessed by terror over the reason. Two children and their mother had just been devoured because, in their affright, they had not been able to find the entrance to their hut. All were plunged in despair. Nothing could be heard but groans from all the houses and prayers from the pagodas; the bravest among them were seized with nerveless terror. Idalmen knocked at one door: he was taken for the lion,

and instead of opening the door the inhabitants secured it with even greater care. He persisted, and they fell to barricading the entrance. At last he spoke to them through a small aperture, and with the utmost difficulty got them to answer. The monster, according to their account, was not what he appeared: it was some magician, some Azur, some malevolent Jinn whom Shiv, the God of Destruction, had bidden destroy the population of those parts. "Nothing stops him, nothing frightens him: fences he destroys and nets he tears to pieces. He attacks armed men face to face, and devours them with their armour and their weapons. The cleverest archers and the most skilful slingers have never been able to get near him; the stones and arrows aimed at him from every side merely fall feebly at his feet."

'Such were the fantastic terrors of these afflicted people. Such are the excesses of ignorance aided by superstition. They began to offer up prayers and invocations to the monster, and they were proposing to propitiate him by the daily offering of a young horse and a sheep. Idalmen, carried away by his desire to restore to these unfortunate people their wits and their peace of mind, went coolly forward to the middle of the thicket where the lion was in the habit of appearing every morning. He soon heard his roars, which, before he saw

the beast, gave him an idea of his formidable foe. Suddenly the lion appeared: he observed my son and stopped for a moment as if struck by the calmness of his demeanour, to which the inhabitants of the country had not accustomed him. Then, roaring and lashing his sides to increase his rage, he made a spring towards the young champion who, for his part, saved him half his journey. Then the fight began before a crowded audience, who shouted and applauded from the roof of every hut. Idalmen had divested himself of a large caftan which he had wrapped round him while on his way; this he had, of design, folded together, and holding it in his left hand, he used it as a soft shield, to ward off the first onslaught of his fearful adversary. The savage brute stood motionless, and as if ashamed of having spent his fury on the cloak; then he returned with redoubled savagery to the charge. Idalmen, quite unperturbed, dexterously flinging out its folds, threw the entire cloak over the eyes of the lion and, taking advantage of that instant, passed his spear through his body. The fight was finished as the great beast rolled over on the ground. In the struggles of his death agony he snapped the shaft of the spear that pierced him; but he carried away the rest of it fixed in his body and dragged himself slowly off to die in a neighbouring cave.

‘While all this was taking place without our knowledge, the same feeling of uneasiness, which had the year before sent me out in search of my son, again compelled me to go and look for him. My wife, the gentle Ixora, although with child and now nearly nine months gone, wished to come with me (in such circumstances a mother has no confidence even in a father); we had already taken the broad road leading to the forest when, as we were least expecting it, we saw a terrified horse galloping towards us. It was Idalmen’s horse, torn and covered with blood from the thorny undergrowth it had gone through. The sight of the frightened animal, all bleeding and disordered, filled us with apprehension : the unhappy mother, whose time was almost come, was overcome by her feelings at this terrifying spectacle and fell senseless in my arms. My son was no doubt far from being conscious of the pain he was giving us. I have since been told that in the excitement of his victory he had hastened to go and reassure the still panic-stricken households that had begged for his assistance. The peasants shouted their joy again and again, and as the good news was passed on he was surrounded by a grateful crowd that grew larger every instant. The whole neighbourhood, amazed by the recovery of their safety, soon came out to meet him: men, women, children and

old people came forward marching two by two in the manner of a religious ceremonial and brought to him, as to a God who had delivered them, the simple gifts which their poverty could offer him. The youth, too quickly moved and melted to tears by the service he had done them, thanked them in his turn, and forgetting in their joy what our apprehensions might be, he consented to take his place among them at the rustic feast which had been prepared for him. You must pardon all these details, Emir; remember that it is a father that is speaking to you about his son.'

'My good Dervish, how could I forget it?'

'I take some pleasure in picturing to myself those moments of joy that Idalmen must have felt: the remainder of the story is so sad.'

'Continue, my worthy friend: everything you say is written upon my heart.'

'I told you that I had despatched huntsmen to the place. I sent double the number: they had arrived at the appointed place, and the company had already begun to split up and spread itself far and wide over the open country and the woods. These manœuvres were useless: the lion, as I have told you, had gone away to die in the depths of a cave. They looked for him in vain, but they found the haft of my son's spear and his cloak torn and dabbled with blood. At the sight of these ominous

traces they were one and all overcome with sorrow. They all lamented their beloved Idalmen, and their one thought was to search in all directions for his remains.

‘His mother and myself, however, had gone to meet him without knowing anything of what was happening, and we were lost in a thousand contradictory conjectures. But since the return of the horse there was but little hope in our hearts to counterbalance our fears. Yet I tried as hard as I could not to abandon it, or rather to kindle it; and supporting the faltering steps of my wife, I wandered at random along the forest paths, when, as dusk was bringing that melancholy day to a close, we saw in the distance some huntsmen who were returning slowly and silently like a funeral procession. Their slow and silent progress seemed to us more than ominous; but when, as they came nearer, we heard their groans and sobs, and when we recognized two of the most faithful attendants on our beloved son, one of them carrying the blood-stained garment and the other the fragment of his weapon; when we saw them fall at our feet and bedew them with their tears . . . No, my dear Emir, I cannot describe to you our feelings. The only recollection that remains with me is that I found myself, as by a miracle, standing at the foot of a bed on which my poor Ixora had been laid. I

tried to speak to her, but she merely replied, "I have lived too long," and the angel of death, who was hovering over her, carried off both the mother and her child.

'But you are weeping, noble warrior! Have my sorrows become yours? Do not try to conceal it: compassion is the adornment of bravery. Let those precious tears flow, my friend: they relieve my feelings as though I were shedding them myself.'

'Go on, good Dervish, though I can hardly bear to listen to your story.'

'I will not describe to you, my dear Emir, the shrieks and lamentations, the dismay and all the growing disorder of that household so suddenly stricken with so many wounds at once. While every one was hurrying hither and thither without knowing where or why, and I was standing almost paralysed in mind and body, motionless at the foot of the bed on which lay my too dearly loved Ixora, sunk in the darkest reflections, and weeping at the same time over the mother whose life had come to an end, and the child condemned by fate never to look upon the world, suddenly I heard a knocking which became more insistent, and my name was called at the door of the apartment in which the body of my Ixora had been laid: it was my son. My son! But will you believe it, noble Emir, it was no consolation to me!'

'Unhappy father!' cried Mohély with a sigh.

'Hitherto you have only heard of his transgression: at this point my crime begins. Alas, I can hear him still, the son whom I have so deeply lamented, calling over and over again: "Father! mother! your son is here!" All the servants, who adored him, rushed to meet him, speechless with astonishment and joy. I pushed them aside, walked to the door myself and partly opened it. At the sight of him I was seized with a rush of fever that confused my mind, and I stopped on the threshold, showing him his mother stretched out upon her bed of death.

' "Look at at your handiwork, O disobedient son!" I said in tones that he was indeed unused to hear: "your mother's death, your grandfather's grief and your father's despair. These are the fruits of your disobedience!"

'The unhappy youth stood as if thunderstruck by what I had shown him and said to him, motionless and without power of speech; but I, distracted by my grief, continued:

' "What had your mother done to you that you should bring her to her death, or your father and his aged parent, whose lives will now be no more than one long lamentation? Go, go far away from here!" I added in increasing anger, and every word I spoke seemed to deepen my indignation. "Fly,

parricide!"—showing him his mother once more —"and take with you to your exile a *father's curse!*"

'With these awful words, the atrocity of which I did not yet realize, I flung the door to and, returning to the fatal chamber, so I was told afterwards, I was seized with prolonged convulsions which, for a period of several hours, deprived me of all consciousness and memory. But as my reason returned, remorse came with it, and I shuddered at what I had done. I was astounded that I had been able to utter those frightful words, whose sound echoed within me like the voice of an enemy. Anger had given place to sorrow, and even sorrow passed into affection. "My son, my Idalmen," I said, "where are you? Let him be sought for everywhere and brought back to me. Your father and my own beg you to return. Come back and let us mourn your mother's death together: you alone stand between your family and death. That curse of mine did not reach you: it fell entirely on your father's guilty head, and only you can avert the vengeance of the Gods!"

'Emir,' continued the Dervish after a short pause, 'I should have thought that you would have been indifferent to all this.'

'Indifferent, good Dervish!'

'I had almost forgotten that it was to you that I am talking, and I cannot forbear thinking that I

am looking upon my son. Ah, God, where can he be? Perhaps, indeed, he is no more.'

'Courage, my worthy father; reflect that the Gods have miracles in reserve for those who call upon them. Your son was guilty, and your anger was justified; your sorrow was deep and your harshness pardonable.'

'Ah! if the Gods had been as indulgent as you, brave Emir, I should now be with my son. But my search was all in vain. He had disappeared into the darkness of the night with the speed of the star which we see parting company with its fellows and plunging into the depths of space, and no trace of him remained. At this melancholy news, it would have been my desire to go off and look for him myself, as I am doing now, in all the four corners of the world. I think the thought of my father was, as I told you, the one thing that held me back. My son had left me, and I felt it all the more my duty not to leave my father.'

'That kindly sage who brought back one of his gloves to put it beside the other which he could not pick up, so that a passer-by might have the benefit of them?'

'The same,' said the Dervish; 'but, my friend, did I mention to you that it was my father?'

'My good Dervish, how else could I have known it?'

‘The reverend Brahmin mourned his grandson during the two years that remained to him. But he was more resigned than I: his sorrow took pity on mine, and not a word of reproach ever found its way into his lamentations. How lovely in the sight of heaven is the sorrow that sacrifices itself to another’s grief. But so great and so constant an effort wore out the faculties that he had left, and though his years were many, it was not of old age that he died. Yes, my lord, I closed his eyes, and believe me, the death of a wise man is a noble and consoling lesson. I have always recalled those last hours with secret satisfaction when his soul, ready to ascend to heaven even more stainless than when it came down to earth, ventured to believe, not without some reason, that it might be permitted to beg a final favour at the hands of those invisible Powers to whom the Father of all has entrusted the conduct of matters here below. “Parswan,” he said, “and thou, Saloa, and thou, Brahma, who on your wings of fire bear up the prayers of the just to the Mighty Throne, if it be true that I have never ceased to hope, after this period of probation, that I might pass in your presence happier days in a world unknown to mortals, be pleased to look upon your servant who is ready to rejoin you. Do not suffer him to carry with him into the midst of your hymns and rejoicings the imprint of the

sorrows of this world of men, and before my eyes close let them see the gleam of a ray of hope in the soul of my son." With these words, the venerable sage fell asleep, but not for ever: he awakened in a few moments and called for a copy of the Veda. Then, appearing to open it at random and looking upon me like one inspired, he moved a trembling finger over the first verses upon which he came. I followed his finger with my eyes and read these two verses: *I do not reject the prayer of the just man for him who has repented.* (You must remember that in the Veda it is Brahma who is speaking); then, turning over the leaves with a convulsive movement, as if seized with those spasms that accompany the soul's farewell to the body, the finger again stopped at this mysterious passage, which seemed to apply especially to me: *Sorrowing soul, heed what I shall say: you mourn for one who mourns for you, you seek for one who is seeking for you . . . They shall meet and shall not know each other, and their hearts shall beat; again they shall seek each other, and I will make them known to one another so that one may die in peace and the other live in glory.* The finger moved again, and for the last time stopped at the bottom of the page at these last words: *Suffering soul, ask for nothing more.* The eyes of the dying man had already closed, never to open again, and his spirit had crossed the space that it has pleased the Master to

leave between the tumults of earth and the peace of heaven. I lamented my loss, but for him I was full of joy; for the miracle portended that he was awaited in heaven.'

'Well, then, worthy Dervish,' interrupted the Emir, 'from that moment hope should always have found a lodging in your heart. The longer you have waited, the less time you have now to wait, for the words of Brahma are not vain like the words of men. And indeed, who could be more deserving of his favour than that worthy sage, who had built him a Pagoda?'

'He certainly did so,' said the Dervish, 'but I do not remember mentioning it to you.'

'My worthy Dervish, how else could I know it?'

'It is true that the consolations of Brahma are beyond description. He has bestowed upon us hope, which comes to the anxious heart like the murmur of a hidden spring to the ear of a traveller consumed by thirst in the deserts of Kurdistan. Without hope, the life of man would be death, and he would feel it so until his last hour.'

At these words, both fell silent for a few moments absorbed in solemn reflections. Then the Emir went on: 'I am thinking of that strange line, *They shall meet and shall not know each other, and their hearts shall beat.*'

‘Yes,’ said the Dervish, ‘those are the very words of the Veda.’

‘Tell me, dear Dervish, have you ever on some particular occasion been conscious of the beating of your heart?’

‘At this very moment, my dear Emir, it is beating more than ever, because, for the first time for fifteen long years, I am speaking about my son and, as I speak to you, I seem to see his image, and am lost in ecstasy. It is as if the gentle Goddess of Illusions was always appearing to his father’s thoughts.’

‘I am conscious of how much I owe you, my worthy Dervish, for so flattering a reply, but try to recall the various impressions that you experienced during this period and speak as if we were indifferent to each other.’

‘It would be too painful,’ said the Dervish; ‘but would you believe it, my dear Emir, at that unforgettable disaster at Lakhnauti . . . but perhaps you were there?’

‘Yes, my worthy Dervish, I was there.’

‘When I was at a loss where to take refuge in the midst of the confusion, the pillage and the slaughter and all the excesses of a licentious soldiery, I, a poor, unknown traveller, at the mercy of every insult and outrage, and in possession of the treasure which I had intended for my dear son . . .’

‘Indeed, my friend, I still shudder at your perils.’

‘Even then, my dear Emir, when I fell in with the gentle hero whose deeds I was relating to you at table, a feeling—an indescribable emotion of joy and affection—suddenly seized me, in some measure in spite of myself, for I felt almost ashamed of experiencing any such feeling, however slightly, amid all the disasters that surrounded me. But when my messenger from heaven (for so I must call him), instead of rejecting, as I had expected him to do, the prayers of a stranger, threw his cloak around my shoulders and lifted me on to his magnificent horse, a feeling of pride came over me the like of which the Sultan himself can hardly feel at the most splendid hour of all his triumphs. I always remember the gentle words of my good protector during the long journey that we had to make before reaching the underground passage by which I made my escape. I tried, as you may imagine, to express all my gratitude. “It is rather for me,” he replied, “my good friend, to thank you for having given me the opportunity of sanctifying myself by a deed which the Invisible Ones alone can perceive. You will never know how greatly I stand in need of their goodwill.” Again I added, “If I were a Vizier, a Rajah, who could suitably acknowledge a service of this kind—but a fugitive, old and poor, a stranger unknown

and obscure, that you meet in the darkness . . .”
“Ah, my friend, the old man that I meet in the darkness may be my father.”

‘At these unexpected words, noble Emir, which he uttered in a tone that I can still hear, a shudder went through all my being; and then when we had once reached the cave and he had refused the gift which I had intended for him whom I was seeking, but which I then offered to my warrior as heartily as I would have bestowed it on my son himself, I had a feeling of some regret; yet at the same time I admired his uprightness, and I prayed that Brahma might grant such a gift to my son.’

‘I feel all this, good Dervish; but surely your warrior was to be pitied, when he had to leave you before the cave, and merely said as you parted, “Farewell, my father, may I one day see thee once again.”’

‘He did indeed say so,’ said the Dervish with a surprised and thoughtful air; ‘yes, he certainly said so, but I do not remember having told you this.’

The Emir replied to him as usual: ‘Good Dervish, how else could I have known it?’

‘This is not the first time,’ said the Dervish, ‘that I have observed in myself a forgetfulness of this sort. Perhaps the wine that I was compelled to drink with your agreeable companions may have

led me without thinking to utterances that I have since, from the same cause, forgotten. I am the more afraid that this may be so, for even now my head feels heavy.'

'Do not hesitate to yield to sleep, my old friend: it is a gift that Brahma bestows more gladly on the just than on the unjust.'

'Ah, my dear Emir,' said the Dervish, as he composed himself to slumber. 'Your words bring me great consolation.'

The Emir, who observed that he was leaning uncomfortably against the damp rock, carefully lifted his head, and unwinding his turban and the piece of muslin with which he invariably covered his face, he made it into a cushion which he gently slipped between the rock and the holy man's head so that he might rest more easily. He then sat beside him, and bending down over his ear and observing that he was in a deep sleep, he whispered in a low voice, 'Abukar, the prophecy of your father is fulfilled: your son is at your side.'

The Emir's words did not awake the Dervish. But although he was still asleep, an unmistakable expression of joy spread over his features, and the Emir felt no doubt that a dim understanding of his words had penetrated the old man's mind in the form of a pleasant dream. Nevertheless, as he was still afraid that his mind was too shaken and

too sensitive to support the emotion that awaited him, he continued as best he might to prepare him and, in the words of the Pundit, to pour the distillations of happiness into his heart drop by drop, lest the vessel might overflow. He accordingly approached the other ear, and said in a low tone, 'Your son is at peace: he has found his father. Idalmen is at the side of Abukar.'

The Dervish, in his amazement, roused himself, rubbed his eyes and thought even his awakening was a dream. The Emir was in very truth beside him, watching his slightest movement, and as he observed that the old man's eyes were opened:

'Most beloved and revered father,' he said, throwing himself at his father's feet, 'remember the burning city and know me once more; for it was the voice of Nature herself that drew you towards me.'

'Can it be truly you? Is it really my Idalmen?' cried the Dervish. 'O Brahma! O Indra! O Arjuna!—all you kindly Deities that have brought him back to me, may a happiness be yours equal to that which you have bestowed upon me. But how could you, oh, my unhappy son, how could you believe in a father's curse? You may one day know how, in such bitter moments, a man's words may be very far from the revealing of his mind.'

'You must now forgive me my transgression,

oh, my father; but, when I saw the consequences of my disobedience, remorse, shame, and self-contempt, like three malignant spirits, took possession of your son. I fled at random merely to get away, and found myself at last at the end of the Mugara ridge, whose last peak breaks down into the sea. It was a terrible night. The persistent roll of thunder seemed to be repeating the sentence that had been passed upon me, and the roaring of the breakers as they beat upon the foot of the rock seemed like the voices of infernal spirits calling me from life. "Here, here, is your victim," I cried, and plunged into the waves like a madman burning to destroy himself. But I was soon after picked up by a Persian ship and restored both to reason and to life. I then prayed to the Gods, who alone have the right to take away the life that they have given us for the common good, to forgive the outrage I had attempted, and I realized that our personal misfortunes may not release us from the service of mankind.

'Shortly afterwards we were attacked by pirates and a fight took place. The part I played in the contest won approval, and the commander of the vessel, who had admitted me to his friendship, made me known under the name I had taken, Mohély, to one of the most eminent generals of the great Akbar—the noble Koramed, whom you

must have especially noticed during the feast, and who combines so much courtesy and wisdom with his skill and bravery. Koramed is much in favour with the Sultan, who is a good judge of men. He obtained an honourable appointment for me, in which I did my duty as well as I could, hiding my scar carefully under my helmet or under the veil that attracted your attention.'

'But, my most beloved son, why these precautions? why wear such a veil?'

'Alas! my father, so as not to be recognized, if there happened to be any officer or soldiers from Romanancore in the army of the great Akbar. My extreme admiration for the great qualities of Akbar have since kept me in his service, where I am still unknown; and yet—for here I may confess everything—it always seems to have been the will of fortune that I should play a not inconsiderable part in his triumphs.'

'And your unhappy father,' broke in the Dervish, and speaking in a meek and humble tone, 'you did not forgive him?'

'I was awaiting his forgiveness, and after three years had passed, hoping that my tears had washed away my guilt in the eyes of Him who judges human hearts, and especially in the eyes of a father whom I thought had spoken more in grief than in anger, I took advantage of a period of

peace, and in the garb of a common soldier, accomplished the dangerous journey to my father's house.

‘“Where is the wise Abukar?” I asked every one I met, and they all replied sadly, “The Jinns alone know, we can tell you nothing. We also would gladly know why he crossed the river, and why he proclaimed himself an outlaw to the King of kings. We would still have a father, and so would you, young stranger, if you came and lived among us, for he loved those from other lands almost as much as his own people. The gentle Kamadeva, the Spirit of Peace and Love, had breathed on his soul at the hour of his birth; but sorrows . . . Alas, young stranger, Emirs, Rajahs even, are subject to these.”’

At these words, the father and son fell sobbing into each other's arms.

‘Continue, my dear Idalmen,’ said the Dervish.

‘Well, my dear father, when I saw that my fellow-men could tell me nothing, I sought the assistance of heaven. I spent the entire night prostrated at the gates of our beloved Pagoda. I called upon all the Gods and Goddesses. I ventured to invoke the aid of Vishnu himself—for all the Gods are but his ministers—and I promised him to do all the good that I was able among my fellow-creatures, convinced that such a vow would be the

most pleasing of all in the sight of the Father and the Friend of all the world. The vow was very dear to my heart, and scarcely had I uttered it, when I felt a hope—no doubt an omen of the Gods' good-will—a hope, I say, of one day obtaining the only reward for which I looked.'

'And what was that, my friend?'

'Need you ask, my father?'

'And then, dear Idalmen . . .?'

'I left once more a place where I had become a stranger: those walls whose very appearance seemed to reproach me with our misfortunes, and on which my streaming eyes seemed ever to read in letters of blood the dreadful sentence of my exile. So I went back to the King of kings, who was then advancing against the King of Platila, the treacherous Hussein, whom he had already twice forgiven. I thought Akbar's cause was just, and I had his glory much at heart. Some slight achievements at the beginning of the campaign brought me into notice under my name of Mohély. Akbar showered gifts upon me, and, prejudiced in my favour by Koramed, he wished to give me command of one of the most distinguished corps in his army. I refused, saying that I preferred to remain a simple volunteer, in order that I might not lose any opportunity of proving to the Sultan my zeal for his glory and my devotion to his

person by entirely disinterested service. My pride appealed to his generous heart, and on the day of Platila . . .’

‘Was it Platila, you said, my son?’

‘Yes, my father,’ said the Emir, lowering his voice; ‘on that memorable day I had the good fortune to be able to carry out this promise. The Sultan never knew it, and I hope that he never will.’

‘What, my son, is it for you that the King of kings has caused search to be made through Iran and Turan? The most generous of warriors and the noblest of men whom the most fortunate of fathers now holds in his arms? But why this long silence? Why keep the secret of your fame for fourteen long years?’

‘Ah, my dear father, glory is not difficult to do without. The approval of my conscience is enough: I do not need congratulations.’

‘But this is an excess of nobility: Indra himself did not disdain glory.’

‘I am aware of it, my father, but the more precious it is to his immortal eyes, the more pleasing I conceived would be the sacrifice that I offered in expiation. You must agree, my father,’ he added smiling, ‘that my hopes have not been deceived, and the events of to-day have proved it. In the sorrowful days that are now over, such

ephemeral renown would have been of little use to an outlaw stricken with a father's curse. And in this happy hour, what are these shadows compared with the joy of winning back my father?'

The old man's happiness was more than he could bear, and he could neither breathe nor speak. He held his son's hands to his lips and they were moist with the tears of his joy and his repentance. As soon as he had recovered his speech: 'My son,' he said, 'let us both forget, if we may, this long interruption in our lives. Now show yourself as you are. A son's glory is a father's treasure: do not take it from me. You owe this to your father, whom you have too harshly punished. You owe it to the King of kings, who would look in vain in his Court and in his camp for so worthy a friend. My son, I am overwhelmed by my delight: and what more can I say? But you owe yourself to the whole world, which stands so greatly in need of the example of the just, the service of the brave, and the counsels of the wise.'

'If you persist, oh, my father,' answered Mohély modestly, 'your will shall be mine; but in your turn you must deign to listen to the supplications of your son, whom your love has sought throughout the earth. The Gods, to his great joy, have condescended to give him back to you: your mission is fulfilled and your pilgrimage accomplished. Lay

aside, therefore, those humble garments, and do not deprive me of a distinction of which I myself am more than jealous, by continuing to conceal from the world the illustrious Sultan of Romanancore.'

With these words, the modest Mohély, who had now become the noble Idalmen once more, went off for a short space and returned, followed by two faithful slaves, who brought the old man an attire more suited to his dignity. As both father and son were of an equally imposing height and build, the metamorphosis was not difficult. The good old man felt himself grow young again in his son's garb, and the Emir felt a pride in helping the attendants who were arranging his father's garments, when suddenly was heard a noise of trumpets, cymbals, drums and all manner of martial music, which could only come from the royal city, which was not far distant. Both were anxious to know what was afoot: and, thinking it might be a public announcement or Firman of the Sultan, they approached without disclosing themselves to view. They soon saw, through the outer rows of palm- and date-trees that hid them, the whole caravan collected round a company of magnificently appressed musicians mounted on superb horses. The music ceased, and a herald-at-arms, in the middle of the company, drew from a gold case a paper bearing the royal seal, and carried it

to his forehead. Then, raising his hand to impose silence on the assemblage, he read in a loud voice as follows:

AKBAR

TO ALL THE INHABITANTS OF THE EARTH

GREETING AND PROTECTION

Heaven preserves the memory of noble actions. The Prophet is careful to record them himself with the point of his scimitar on diamond tablets. What the Prophet does in heaven, Akbar does on earth. As he is powerful, so he desires to be just: and if he has more than once forgotten a crime he will never forget a service.

You remember the winding valleys in the country of Platila. It was there that the Angel of Battles, the friend of the Prophet, who was accustomed to hover over the head of Akbar, pretended for one moment to abandon us in order to test our courage, so that he might tell the Prophet with more assurance that he had truly chosen the mightiest of earth's inhabitants as the object of all his favours. Hussein is no more. He was then the enemy of Akbar and had advanced against us with a prodigious array, and his army was awaiting ours before the walls of Platila. But the sight of our brave soldiers terrified him, and he sent to ask for a parley, as though desiring to treat with us.

We consented, for Akbar has never rejected a suppliant. The armies were to remain each in their own camp. The two monarchs were to set forth as soon as the sun should appear above the heights of Mount Erima. They were to go unescorted, and their horses were to approach each other at a walk. The agreements were signed, hostages given, and the oaths were sworn. But the Spirit of Truth dwelt with us, and the Demon of Treachery was watching over the counsels of our enemy. Daylight was in the soul of Akbar, and night in that of Hussein. Yet Akbar, who was watching the peaks of Erima, set out without fear and accompanied only by four Emirs. The enemy seemed to be doing likewise. He even pretended to prostrate himself as we approached, for such homage cost the traitor nothing. We extended to him the hand of mercy, and prepared ourselves to near him, when suddenly, at a given signal, a thousand warriors burst from the hollows of the rocks and the darkness of the woods and fell upon Akbar, and a thousand others followed them. Our army was too far off to protect us, and as they could not see us, had stayed in camp in obedience to our orders, without a suspicion that treachery might be possible. Our four Emirs, at that moment the entire escort of the King of kings, did their duty: we watched them fight like lions at our side, and we saw them fall at

our feet pierced by a thousand wounds, and their great souls await us in the celestial city of heroes. Deprived of our companions, and left with no other protection but our right arm, we fought for a time alone against an entire army. The slaughter was immense, and every blow that we struck added to the spoils of the Angel of Death. But our armour, all slashed and pierced, began by now to show the stains of our blood. Our lance was shattered and useless: the edge of our sword was blunted, and could no longer bite into the iron corselets of the enemy. Our stout horse had been hamstrung, and had fallen beneath us. Until now the treacherous Hussein had been content to encourage his men by his exhortations alone, but when he saw us disarmed and on foot, he wanted the glory of the combat to be his. The first blow of his great scimitar had already struck off our golden helmet. Peoples and kings, hear and tremble: the steel was already raised once more over our defenceless head, when the head of Hussein and the hand still holding his weapon fell beside us, cut off by the same blow. Some mortal man (if indeed he be so), swift as lightning, terrible as the thunderbolt, had crossed the mountains and fallen upon the traitors. He brushed them aside as a huntsman brushes aside the undergrowth in his path, turned his agile steed about in

the midst of their huddled ranks, sowing death everywhere, and seemed like an autumn gale scattering the heaps of dead leaves. Then, when his sword had cleared a large space round us where none of our adversaries dared any longer tread, he dismounted, raised us with his all-conquering arm, gave us his lance, took off his helmet and placed it upon our head, ordered his horse to kneel down, helped us to mount, and, leaping on one of the enemy's horses, disappeared.

'Messenger of heaven,' cried Akbar to him, 'what is your name?'

'Call me Faithful,' he replied, galloping towards our army, which was moving forward, not knowing what had happened, but uneasy at our delay. But he could not altogether escape the eyes of the King of kings: an instant was enough for us to notice upon one of his cheeks the impression of a lance-point, the imprint, no doubt, of the Angel of War himself, who wished to distinguish him by this mark from among all his brave companions.

On the morrow of the day which will never be forgotten throughout the world, all the Emirs received orders to review the soldiers under their command, in order to detect the warrior thus marked with the lance-point. Alas, he could not be found. 'He is with the dead,' said the King of kings, and the King of kings shed tears.

‘Let him be sought for among the dead,’ he continued, ‘and let him be brought into our presence so that his master may at least weep over his body.’ But they came back and said to the King of kings:

‘He whom you seek cannot be found among the dead.’

‘Perhaps he is therefore still among the living,’ we cried, and the peoples saw a ray of hope flash across the features of the King of kings. Then we continued:

‘You are to collect all the corpses of our enemies that fell beneath our blows: then the bodies of our brave companions whose death we lament. Let them all be carried to the place where the mighty Emir saved Akbar’s life. And let them be placed one upon the other like the stones in the pyramids of Memphis. The faces of the enemy are to be turned towards the earth, the faces of our comrades towards the sky, and the bodies of the four holy Emirs who fell at our side shall be placed above them all.

‘Stones from the mountains of Platila shall serve for the walls of the pyramid, and this shall be the habitation of those who were yesterday among the living and to-day are no more. The story of that day shall be inscribed in all languages on the base of the mighty sepulchre; and on the side of it on

which the light of day shines most brightly, gleaming rubies inset in a large golden tablet shall present this inscription:

‘To his unknown friend,
The grateful Akbar.’

The tomb was built and the King of kings slept in peace, thinking that gratitude as well as justice had been satisfied, and fourteen years full of toils and victories have passed, but the hero has never been discovered. But now that peace so miraculously reigns over Iran and Turan, even as it was before humanity saw the light, now that weapons are of as little use on earth as in heaven . . . Akbar sleeps in peace no more. Every night the hero appears to us in dreams, marked with the lance-point on his cheek, and says, ‘Akbar, it was in vain that you sought me among the dead.’ We have questioned our learned men upon our dream: we have consulted Magi, Brahmins, Penitents, Sanissis, Fakirs, Priests and the Soothsayers of all religions known to men, and all have replied, ‘The hero lives, for the King of kings has dreamed it.’

We therefore ordain that the most careful search be made for the saviour of Akbar throughout all the countries of the earth. It is our will that, as soon as he be revealed, every knee shall be bent before him as before us ourselves; that he shall approach

nearer to our throne than any of the other kings of the earth, and shall receive at our hands the crown of Platila; and that the remainder of his days and of ours shall pass in the enjoyment of affectionate fellowship. This is the will of the King of kings.

The wise Abukar and his son, who were hidden from all eyes while the proclamation was being read, could not decide how to act; and as soon as the herald had ceased speaking, Idalmen, much disturbed, suggested to his father that they should take advantage of this moment of astonishment and agitation and both of them escape by certain paths known to them alone, thus avoiding all the honours with which they were threatened.

‘No, my son, no, Idalmen,’ replied his noble sire: ‘the Gods who avenge the *Sastra*, the oath, forbid it, and you too are bound by my words. The King of kings can claim the truth from me, and he shall have it at my hands. What, Idalmen! we should not dare even to shelter a criminal from his justice: would you propose to cheat him of his gratitude to a hero? Remember what I am, and that you are soon to wield the authority of a king; recognize for the last time a father’s authority. Let this,’ he added, taking his son in his arms, ‘be the last expiation of the sin that we have both so deeply mourned.’

‘But, my father, now that you, like your son, have become accustomed to obscurity, do you not feel, like him, how irksome we shall find this sudden elevation? Though the chains be of gold, are we any the less bound?’

‘My son,’ replied the old Rajah, ‘true wisdom does indeed advise a peaceful life, but still enjoins upon us the performance of our duty. Your fame is no longer your own: it belongs to the whole world. Your deeds are heavenly diamonds fallen from the girdle of the kindly Drougah, Goddess of Virtue: if you conceal them you are taking what is not your own. If your father’s joy is of any value in your eyes, my Idalmen, do not any longer deny my supplications. Alas! the world has too often and too long witnessed my humiliation: now I would have it applaud my triumph and see me radiant in the glory of my son.’

With these words, he took the Emir by the hand and, in spite of his reluctance, led him quickly out of the wood in which they had been concealed. The assembled company marvelled at their altered aspect. Mohély, who had never been seen without his helmet or his veil, showed himself adorned by his honourable scar; and they were no less astonished at the majestic air of the old Rajah, who, leaning on the shoulder of his noble son, took pleasure in directing the gaze of the assemblage to

the heroic mark which henceforward all the people of the earth were to contemplate with love and honour.

‘Yes, noble Emirs,’ he said, ‘the hero who saved the life of the King of kings stands before you. That mark which you had never seen, and those qualities which you have so greatly admired, shall prove it to you. Follow, all of you, his father’s example, and let us be the first to salute the unconquerable Idalmen.’

He was greeted with an instantaneous shout, thrice repeated, from all the company: ‘King of Platila, friend of the King of kings, live for ever!’

‘My father,’ said Idalmen, as he embraced them all with tears in his eyes, ‘you forget my most cherished honours—those of being your son and their companion in arms.’

By daybreak, Idalmen, riding at his father’s side, escorted by all the Emirs and the rest of the soldiers in the caravan, had reached the summit of the green hills that encircle the royal city. The glittering tops of domes, towers, obelisks, and minarets already began to show among the morning mists. The groups of ornaments that surmounted the roofs of the palace of the King of kings, touched by the first rays of the rising orb of the sun, seemed like so many children of that luminous divinity, eager to greet him before the

rest of nature, when two columns of huge elephants appeared in the distance like two long mountain chains, advancing in procession to meet the caravan. There were a hundred in each column: their trappings were studded with large plaques of gold and silver. Each of them carried a richly adorned palanquin, whose curtains, gracefully drawn aside, disclosed the most exquisite beauties of Georgia and Circassia. The space between each elephant and the one in front was occupied by a troop of a hundred cavalry mounted on horses of various breeds and hues. In front of each troop came four richly caparisoned camels, each carrying two archers, who waved in the air immense peacocks' tails and crystal crescents attached to the end of lance-shafts. To the right and left of the procession marched at the same pace two columns of prisoners. A chain ring round the foot of each of them bore witness to their slavery, and they marched unarmed, dragging in the dust the standards which they had once followed into battle. Their melancholy and submissive expression contrasted with the proud step of the soldiers of the invincible army that surrounded them, as if they were bringing them back from the battlefield. The sheen of the weapons of Akbar's warriors filled the horizon with glittering points of light, while on every side innumerable

flags, ensigns, standards, and banners of all colours floated in the wind and looked from a distance like a vast garden of moving flowers suspended in the air.

Among the elephants, horses, camels and the regiments of soldiers that covered the plain, thousands of children, with no other direction or authority than the gaiety natural to their age, danced, leaped and ran in all directions, engaged in all manner of various diversions and, sometimes in groups, sometimes scattered, as their fancy led them, they presented a lively picture of a people free and happy under the protection of their terrible defenders; while from bands of minstrels and musicians, moving as if at random among the crowds, came sounds of song or music, constantly interrupted by the shouts of the vast multitude.

In the midst of this gay confusion the elephants pursued their silent course, always preserving equal distances between each other, like carefully drilled troops. Among them could be seen the magnificent Orangas, the royal elephant, the handsomest of them all, marching solemnly at their head; a thousand horses, whiter than the snow on Mount Ararat, seemed to display their pride at being in this company, and the royal standard floated above his howdah of gold brocade. In it was seated the Sultan himself at the side of his favourite daughter, rightly named

Parijata, or the Tree of Paradise, who shone among the rarest beauties of Iran and Turan like a diamond among pearls. But the spectators did not cast a glance at all these marvels: they preferred to fix their gaze on the King of kings, who for the first time condescended to show himself to this countless multitude. They delighted in recounting to one another Akbar's exploits, his good deeds, his labours and his perils. The peace of the world was the gift of his hands, and they all looked with affectionate respect upon those majestic features that showed more wisdom than pride, and even upon the lines that had traced too soon upon that imposing countenance the story of a life worn down by victories.

We must stop for one moment and discover how the riddle which had been so lately solved had so soon reached the Sultan's ears. It may be remembered that Mohély had folded up his veil to make a pillow for the Dervish while he slept; that the Dervish when he awoke recognized his son; and that the Emir, feeling, perhaps, some embarrassment in proclaiming himself the son of a holy man, had hastened to procure for him a more suitable attire, and that he probably forgot to put on his veil. Koramed, without being observed by his friend, saw him pass with his face uncovered, and had particularly noticed the purple mark of which

they had spoken during dinner: the gallantry and modesty of Mohély betrayed the rest. The royal city lay but a quarter of a day's journey distant, and Koramed galloped there in less than an hour. Akbar, overcome with joy, immediately sent the Firman to the caravan. Koramed had already come back to salute the King of Platila, and by the evening he was again with the Sultan. On his return, Mohély's friend was appointed Grand Vizier: the Sultan made known his intentions to him and entrusted him with the arrangement of the celebrations. Koramed spent all night upon the matter, and was now to be seen by the side of Orangas, mounted on a superb Persian steed, resplendent with purple and jewels, but above all with his joy at his friend's triumph.

Meanwhile the caravan, astonished at what they saw, continued to advance in the direction of the procession. Koramed discerned his friend from a distance and pointed him out to the Sultan. In an instant the whole army halted, and the mighty Akbar, laying aside his pomp and oblivious of all the ceremony of his court—for joy knows no such restraints—dismounted from his elephant and, to the amazement of his escort, went to meet Idalmen on foot. When he saw this, the Emir leapt from his horse and threw himself at the Sultan's feet. Akbar raised and clasped him affectionately

in his arms: then removing the magnificent aigrette that gleamed above his turban, and which kings alone have the right to wear: 'King of Platila,' said he, 'receive at my hands this first mark of the Royalty which should for so long have been yours. Your kingdom is not a gift that you owe to my friendship: you have won it by your constancy and courage and by the help of your Gods.'

He then had brought before him the helmet and the lance that the Emir had once lent him: they were carried by two high officers on a carpet of cloth of gold embroidered with emeralds and diamonds.

'Flower of my warriors,' he said, 'these shall serve you everywhere for your crown and your sceptre. Take them once more, these ever victorious arms: they bestowed on me the empire of the world and on you the heart of a friend.'

The Sultan then invited him and the aged Rajah to take their places on the royal elephant. Silence was commanded throughout the vast multitude that surrounded them, and a hundred heralds at a hundred different points gave out the order, 'Let all men salute the King of Platila, the invincible, the brother and the friend of the King of kings.'

THE END



